

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

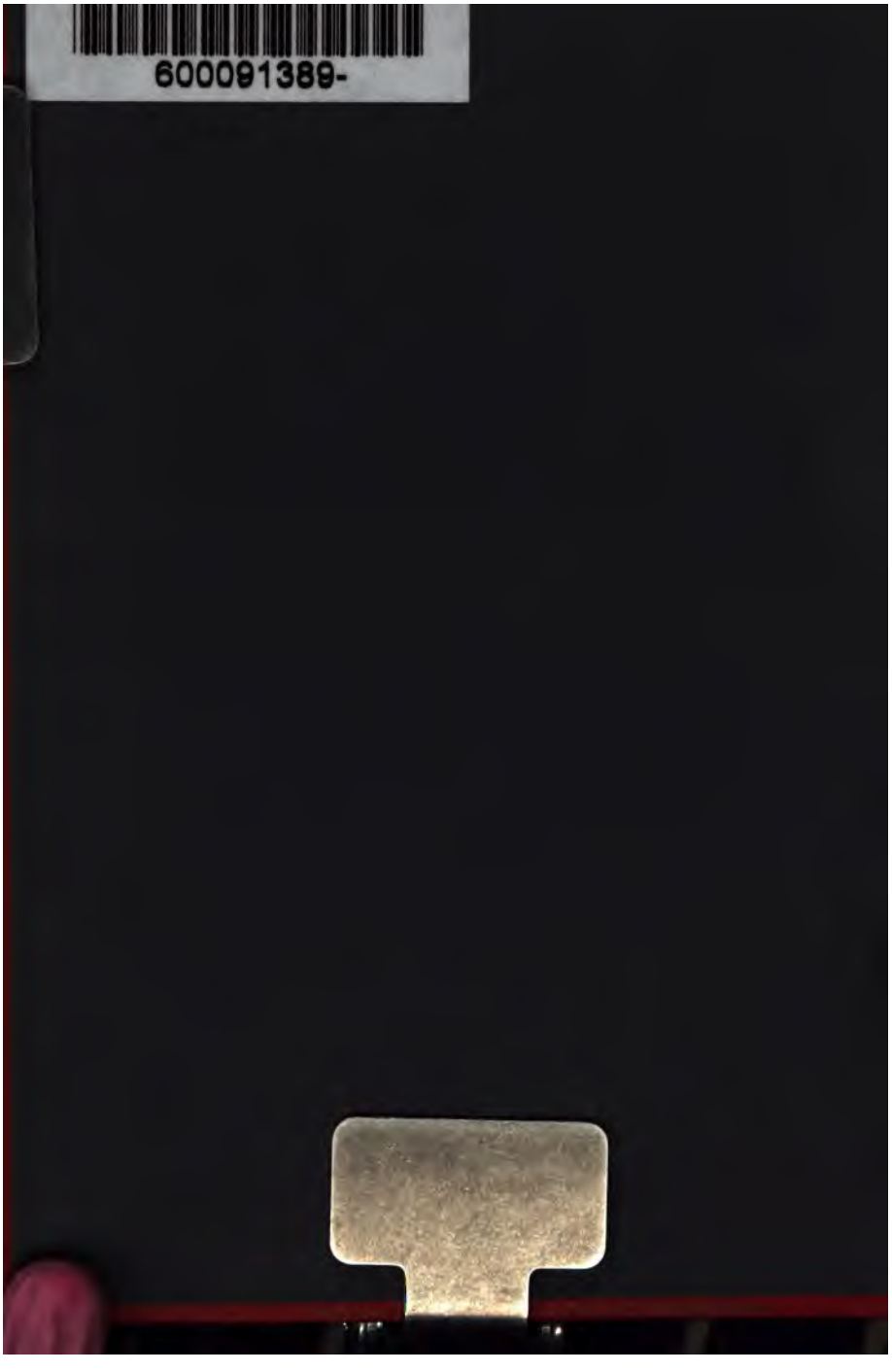
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

The Joyful Sound


600091389-

THE JOYFUL SOUND.

THE

JOYFUL SOUND:

BEING NOTES ON THE

FIFTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF ISAIAH.

BY

WILLIAM BROWN,

AUTHOR OF "THE TABERNACLE AND ITS SERVICES."

"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound."

BIBLIOTHECA
JAN 79
BODLEIANA

EDINBURGH
WILLIAM OLIPHANT & CO.
LONDON: HAMILTON, ADAMS, & CO.
1879.

101. f. 611.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY LORIMER AND GILLIES,
31 ST. ANDREW SQUARE.

PREFACE.

THIS book, "The Joyful Sound," and my work on "The Tabernacle" are thus far connected that both themes formed the subject of lessons for a Young Women's Sabbath Morning Bible Class. It was my custom to have for one Sabbath morning a subject such as "The Tabernacle," that required a good deal of close study on the part of teacher and scholars; and on the alternate Sabbath a subject such as "The Joyful Sound," that might be more simply treated, and involve less labour. On this and other accounts, though I do not expect for this adaptation of "The Joyful Sound" such a large circulation as "The Tabernacle" has met with, yet I hope it may in some measure be found useful.

W. B.

5 HANOVER STREET,
EDINBURGH, *November*, 1878.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	"HO,"	1
II.	"EVERYONE,"	7
III.	"EVERYONE THAT THIRSTETH,"	14
IV.	"COME,"	19
V.	"COME TO THE WATERS,"	29
VI.	"HE THAT HATH NO MONEY, COME,"	42
VII.	"BUY AND EAT,"	56
VIII.	"BUY WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE,"	61
IX.	"WHEREFORE,"	69
X.	"EAT THAT WHICH IS GOOD,"	82
XI.	"DELIGHT YOUR SOUL IN FATNESS,"	87
XII.	"INCLINE YOUR EAR,"	99
XIII.	"COME UNTO ME,"	107
XIV.	"YOUR SOUL SHALL LIVE,"	114
XV.	"AN EVERLASTING COVENANT,"	121
XVI.	"WITNESS, LEADER, AND COMMANDER,"	134
XVII.	"NATIONS SHALL RUN UNTO THEE,"	144
XVIII.	"SEEK YE THE LORD" (WHERE HE IS TO BE FOUND),	158

CHAPTER PAGE

XIX. "SEEK YE THE LORD" (HOW HE IS TO BE SOUGHT AND FOUND), ... 165

XX. "SEEK YE THE LORD" (WHEN HE IS TO BE SOUGHT AND FOUND), ... 172

XXI. "HE WILL ABUNDANTLY PARDON," 180

XXII. "MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS," . . 191

XXIII. "MY WORD SHALL NOT RETURN VOID," . . . 208

XXIV. "JOY AND PEACE," 217

XXV. "INSTEAD OF THE THORN THE FIR," 224

XXVI. "IT SHALL BE TO THE LORD FOR A NAME," . . 231

XXVII. "AN EVERLASTING SIGN," 235

"THE JOYFUL SOUND."

ISAIAH LV.

CHAPTER I.

"HO."

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."—ISAIAH lv. 1.

"HO" gives a peculiar charm to this chapter of Isaiah. We could not substitute another word for it without marring the beauty of this portion of the Bible. To remove it would be like removing from some stately edifice its lofty spire or ornamental doorway, or other prominent feature. The joyful noise it makes sounds throughout the whole chapter, to whose glad tidings it is ever directing our attention. While interjections are much misapplied by some, and by others regarded as mere unmeaning sounds, they are, nevertheless, in many instances nobly employed, and have sometimes been mighty to save when the most powerful and eloquent words that were ever spoken would have utterly failed.

A gentleman, entering the bedroom in which his sick

wife lay, was horror-struck in observing a glass of poison in her hand, which she had mistaken for her usual medicine, and was in the act of raising to her lips. Before he could have formed or spoken a sentence, the fatal draught would have been drunk, but he loudly cried out "Ho." It was enough—the glass fell from her trembling hand, and her life was saved.

An old woman was crossing one of our leading streets just as an omnibus was approaching, and was very nearly ridden over. The driver, seeing that he could not pull up in time to save her, cried out; but she did not hear his warning. Fortunately, at that moment a man was passing who was able to cry out "Ho" in stentorian tones, which rose high above the cry of the driver, the noise of the street, and the rattle of the wheels. She heard this "Ho," and was saved. In another second, but for this loud "Ho," she would have been dead or maimed for life.

In some cases a cry, however loud, unaccompanied with means of safety, would be impotent to save. A little girl fell into the harbour of one of our seaports, and was speedily carried by the tide to a considerable distance from the quay. No swimmer was at hand, and no boat could be got ready in time to rescue her. An old weather-beaten seaman, his face all aglow with pity and eagerness to save the life that was in jeopardy, appeared on the scene, bearing a life-buoy on his shoulders, and while with all his might crying out "Ho," at the same time, with well-directed aim, threw the buoy to the drowning girl. That cry was music in her ears; she knew by its tones that it bore salvation on its wings.

She looked around, and seeing the preserver close at hand, grasped it, and was brought safe to land.

These were three great "Ho's"; but, great as they were, they are but faint echoes of the greatest "Ho," that ever did or ever will fall on mortal ears,—the "Ho" that comes rolling down from the lips of our Father in heaven, and making as it comes a loud but winsome sound; loud, that it may arouse the perishing to a sense of their danger, and winsome that it may induce the aroused to avail themselves of the means of salvation. This cry, like that of the old sailor, bears salvation on its wings, for He who calls so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. "Ho" is followed by "come": come to the waters—that is, come to Jesus the fountain-head, for those rich and precious life-giving and life-sustaining blessings to which "Ho" in this chapter of Isaiah so invitingly points.

Sinners, when aroused by the warnings of God's Word to a sense of impending danger, cannot save themselves by running, like the woman from the approaching omnibus, in this or in that direction, but to no particular object, for go where they may, the law with its threatenings will pursue them. They can only escape from the wrath to come by flying to Jesus, who is ever near at hand, and ever ready to receive all who come to Him. All who have fled to Him are safe, for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Sinners, when aroused to a sense that they are perishing, can no more save themselves than the drowning girl could have saved herself by laying hold of herself. They,

like her, are utterly helpless, but the hand of Jesus is stretched forth to save. All who grasp that hand are saved with an everlasting salvation. Once more, sinners when aroused to a sense, not merely like the lady, that they are in danger of swallowing poison, but that they have actually imbibed the fatal draught, cannot, by partaking of any human antidote, save themselves from its fatal effects. But there is a great Physician who holds out to the diseased and dying a cup of living water, with the blessed result, that all who drink are cured. Perishing sinner, press, oh press, this cup to thy lips. Drink and live.

Although "Ho" and other warnings of God's Word are sounding in the ears of multitudes, comparatively few give heed to them. Many deliberately resolve not to attend to them lest they be converted, and Christ should heal them. On reflection, such hardened sinners cannot but be amazed that God has not given them up long ago. The reason why He has not is, that He is not willing that even they should perish, but that they should turn unto Him and live. Remember, however, you who thus treat the voice of Divine mercy, that the long-suffering of God has limits, which, in your case, may be about to be reached. If you shut your ears against this loud "Ho," which is seeking to arouse you to a sense of the danger your soul is in of being lost for ever, God may call to you no more. Be entreated, then, to give instant heed to this warning cry.

Many do not quite refuse to give heed to God's warning voice, they only delay availing themselves of the means of salvation to which it points. By-and-by they intend to come to Jesus. Sometime, at least, before they

die—only not now. You who thus delay, call up to your remembrance those of your acquaintances and friends who, like you, intended, some time or other, to attend to the warnings of God's Word, and seek salvation, but who died as they lived, without God and without hope in the world. More, perhaps, in Christian lands have lost their souls by procrastination than from any other cause. If you would not lose yours too, attend at once to the "Ho" that now falls on your ears. Court rather than shun its voice, however much it may alarm you. Let it ring in your ears until you have fled for salvation to Him who came to seek and to save the lost. Let its echoes die away, without your being prompted by them to come to Jesus, and soon—not "Ho," but—these awful words may be sounding in your ears: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded,—I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

Some do not wish to shut their ears against God's warning voice, nor to delay seeking salvation. They would gladly be saved and at once, but they imagine they are too great sinners to be saved. "Had they sought," they say, "salvation when they were younger, or before they had been guilty of this or that sin or course of iniquity, or before they had committed what they conceive to be the sin against the Holy Ghost, they might have been saved;—but now it is too late; the warnings that are ringing in their ears are only adding to their remorse." For them it is not too late—

> "For while the lamp holds on to burn,
> The greatest sinner may return;"

so that should you be such a sinner, there is salvation even for you. The fact that God's warning voice "Ho" is now sounding in your ears is a witness that it is not too late. The very object of that cry is to induce you to flee to Christ. God is not a mocker, which He would be if His warnings were intended only to alarm you, and not also to induce you to accept of salvation. It is not too late. You have not committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. Those guilty of this sin are never troubled as you are with the thunders of God's voice. The concern you feel for your soul is clear and unmistakable evidence that God is waiting to be gracious. His invitation to all anxious, trembling sinners is—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Ye who have already come to Jesus,—may "Ho," though for you it may no longer have a thunderous sound, ever be like sweet music in your ears, inviting you to come to the fountain of living waters, for ever new and fres supplies.

CHAPTER II.

"EVERY ONE."

WERE the words of the Bible arranged in the order of their importance, "Every one," if not found amongst those which occupied the highest place, would be so high up as to touch the words which had this pre-eminence. The next greatest calamity to the blotting of the Sun of Righteousness out of the Scriptures would be the blotting of "every one" and its synonyms out of the inspired volume. Were this to occur, we could no longer sing the beautiful hymn, beginning—

> "A glory gilds the sacred page,
> Majestic like the sun;
> It gives a light to every age,
> It gives, but borrows none."

"Every one," "every creature," "every man," "whosoever," "world," "whole world," and like words and phrases are those which more than any others have been instrumental in leading sinners to the cross. Prophets and apostles, angels and the Lord of angels, when speaking to us on the themes which most concern our everlasting well-being, employ one or other of these winsome words—

words which seem ever to be in close proximity to the most glorious truths revealed to us in the Scriptures. Hear Isaiah—"Ho, *every one* that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Hear the angel who announced the birth of the Messiah to the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains—"Fear not; for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all people*." Hear John the Baptist—"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of *the world!*" Hear John the Evangelist—"He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the *whole world*." Hear Paul—"That he by the grace of God should taste death for *every man*;" and again—"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all men*." Hear Him who spake as never man spake—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Give an attentive ear to the following words, which were among the last that dropped from His blessed lips—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to *every creature*."

What a sad book the Bible would become if God's love, and the death of Christ, and the offer of salvation were divorced from "*every one*" and other all-embracing words. We recollect reading an account of a very sad incident connected with a shipwreck. After the vessel went down, only one boat floated on the angry waves. It was quite full of men, women, and children, and was in great danger of capsizing. There were many struggling for their lives all around, but those in charge of the boat would not allow another person to enter. Two men, eager to save themselves, got hold of the sides of the boat, but the

helmsman immediately caused their hands to be chopped off. Perhaps he would have preferred to have had his own cut off rather than have given such an order, if such a course had been consistent with the safety of the lives committed to his care. How awfully sad both for the saved and the perishing. Blessed be God, sinners saved by grace and those who are perishing around them can never be placed in analogous circumstances to those we have been describing. The gospel ark as it floats along to rescue the perishing has emblazoned on its flags, "FOR EVERY ONE." The captain, the officers, the sailors, and the passengers all cry out, "FOR EVERY ONE." Every voice is vocal with encouragement, and every hand is held out to rescue, and the cry ever is, "Yet there is room." Change the figure to the hungry, dying for food; or the thirsty, dying for water; or to the sick and the diseased, dying for lack of an antidote, and the same glorious truth is illustrated. On the portals of the gateways leading to the gospel feast we read, "For every one;" on the fountain of living waters the same inviting word is inscribed, "For every one." On the remedy for the fatal disease engendered by sin we find shining the same hope-inspiring word, "For *every one*." While "every one" is addressed to innumerable multitudes, as far as you are concerned, it has to do with you in particular. God, through the prophet Isaiah, is speaking to you yourself, as really as if He called you by your name. He is offering to you unspeakably precious blessings. Were men as alive to their spiritual as they are to their temporal welfare, how would this word "every one" arrest their attention and gladden their hearts.

The friends of a very rich old lady shortly after her death met to hear her will read. They all appeared deeply interested, and put themselves in the attitude of attentive listeners, with the exception of a nephew who had greatly offended her, and who had been made aware that she had struck him out of her will. Out of courtesy, he had been invited to the meeting, and out of courtesy he attended, but he displayed no interest like the others as the lawyer from a bundle of papers selected the will and began to read it. Each relative in turn, as his or her name and the sum associated with it was mentioned, looked sorely disappointed, the amount being so small in comparison with what was expected. At last, to the astonishment of all, and to none more so than to the nephew himself, his name was mentioned. He was listless no more, and now lent a ready ear to all that followed. Not expecting anything, he would have been thankful for a like portion as the rest; but his aunt, who had changed her mind regarding him, having come to see that in the matter which had caused the estrangement between them, she had been wrong and he had been right, restored him to his original place in the will. She left him her vast wealth, with the exception of some trifling legacies. The nephew was now the most deeply interested in the will, and the one whom it gladdened most. The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is a leaf, or rather an abstract, of the will of Him who possesses all things, and in it He bequeaths to you priceless gifts, gifts more precious than all the riches this great globe contains. The best of it is, your name is in it. You may see it in "*every one*," in characters that he who runneth may read. Not a part, but the whole of these gifts are freely offered

to you, and you may possess them all, without depriving a single individual of any part of them. Have you responded to the invitation, and do you now esteem these gifts as your most precious treasure? If not, we entreat you no longer to be guilty of such folly,—folly infinitely greater than that of the nephew if he had refused to accept of the wealth bequeathed to him by his aunt. If you continue to refuse while your day of grace lasts, these words "every one" will rise up in the judgment to confront you. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, . . . I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh." May these words "every one" now draw you to Jesus. Your sins, however many, and however aggravated, have not caused God to erase your name from the gospel invitation. You are included in these words "every one." If there are texts in the Word of God which seem to you to teach or imply that you are not included in "every one," and that the blessings freely offered to those addressed by it cannot possibly become yours, you are misunderstanding or misinterpreting these texts. It is the God of truth, He who cannot lie, who says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

A poor cripple was permitted to sit at a convenient place in one of our busy streets with the view of being helped by the passers-by. Some good people who took an interest in him, although he had been a very ignorant and wicked man, induced him to begin to learn to read. Having lost both his arms, his lesson-book was held before him by a desk expressly made to suit his case. After mastering the alphabet, the Gospel according to John was one of

the first books he tried to read. The little words which abound in John he easily learned, but he had considerable difficulty with the long words, both in pronouncing and understanding them. Coming to the word "whosoever," and not fully comprehending its meaning, he called to a message-boy, and asked if he could tell him the meaning of the word. "Oh yes," said the boy, "it just means that man there, or me, or you, or anybody." The poor cripple, his countenance beaming with joy, exclaimed, "Then it really means me;" and he now believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and became a child of God and an heir of glory, as his after walk and conversation showed. In "every one," "whosoever," and like words, the Master calleth thee, as really as if He called you by your name. Follow now—for now is the accepted time—the example of the cripple, by coming to Jesus at the call of God, who is naming you in "every one," and you shall become possessed of unsearchable riches, and be entitled to an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away.

If you are one of those who have responded to the gospel invitation, remember that although "every one" singles you out, it also means "*every one*" in the same house with yourself, every one of your neighbours, every one of your fellow-citizens, every one of your countrymen,—in a word, every one of the inhabitants of the whole world. Oh! it is an all-embracing word, and therefore, though it calls loudly upon you in the first place to accept of salvation, it likewise calls upon you to offer it to others. That gospel which has saved and gladdened you is free to all. Yours be the delightful mission to publish it to every one,

as you have opportunity, by your personal efforts, by your pecuniary support to home and foreign missions, as the Lord hath prospered you, and by your prayers. In dependence on Divine aid, seek ever to be obeying the Master's great command: "Go,—preach the gospel to every creature."

CHAPTER III.

"EVERY ONE THAT THIRSTETH."

"EVERY one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" is an invitation that knows no limit. Had it been restricted to those who are thirsting after righteousness, it would not have been followed by the expostulation, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Soul thirst, like bodily thirst, is universal. Both have been implanted in us by our Heavenly Father, for the purpose of inducing us to repair to those ample supplies which He has furnished in nature for satisfying the one, and in grace for satisfying the other.

Natural hunger and thirst are not evils in themselves, but are amongst the greatest gifts which we have received from our Maker. They are more necessary to our temporal wellbeing than sight or hearing or limbs, or many other blessings which might be named. We could dispense with sight, or hearing, or hands, or feet, and yet live on, and even enjoy life. But deprive us of hunger and thirst, and our existence here would soon come to an end. Without the sensations of hunger and thirst, we would

never know when our bodies required food and drink, nor how much of the one or the other it was needful to consume, and hence eating and drinking would become irksome and even repulsive. Under such a state of things, health could not be maintained, nor life preserved. Hunger and thirst, then, are good angels, one on this side and one on that, guarding the citadel of life. As long as these angels remain with the sick, there is hope of recovery, but when they take their final departure, it is a sure indication that health is waning, and that life is ebbing.

Water is so abundant, widespread, and easily obtainable, that people in general are more familiar with the pleasurable than with the uneasy sensations arising from thirst. Yet there is none of us but at times has felt how painful it is to be thirsty, and to have to wait a few hours before being able to obtain drink to relieve our craving. Travellers passing through burning, sandy deserts, where water is scarce, have frequently suffered dreadfully from thirst. The longing of such thirsty ones, when deprived of drink for some time, becomes very distressing. Their whole being cries out for water, to obtain which men have been willing to part with diamonds, gold, silver, —yea, all the valuables they possessed. Not a few shipwrecked sailors have been thirst's greatest victims. Some have been known to stand up to their chin in the sea for hours, an expedient that assuaged in some degree the intensity of their thirst. Others in desperation have been known to swallow salt water, although aware that this would soon be followed by greater sufferings than ever. The pangs arising from thirst are even keener than those

caused by hunger. Individuals have been known who attempted to starve themselves to death, and for several days were able to abstain from food, but were not able to resist the desire for drink. There have been men who resolved not to give their enemies the gratification of witnessing them murmuring or complaining when being tortured to death, and but for thirst would have succeeded, but its pangs and the sight of water unsealed their lips. We hear no word from the meek and lowly Jesus when the cross is put upon His back, or when the crown of thorns is planted upon His brow, or when the nails that fixed His body to the accursed tree are driven through His hands and feet; how dreadful, then, must have been the excruciating pain that drew from His blessed lips that cry of agony, "I thirst!" This restless, imperious, unremitting, tormenting, agonising longing of the thirsty for water is employed as an emblem of the soul's desire for happiness, as long as it seeks satisfaction only in the perishing things of time and sense; and a more striking and truthful emblem could not be found. On every side we are surrounded by multitudes of living witnesses who attest its truthfulness. We see them restless, eager, panting, as they run hither and thither in every direction in quest of that which they vainly imagine will slack their soul's thirst, but never satisfied, even when gaining the object of their pursuit, be it gold, or honour, or power, or fame, or pleasure, or whatever else this world can give; for these have failed and ever will fail to gratify the soul's craving. Solomon, Alexander the Great, the greater and the lesser Napoleon, and others of earth's favourites, conspicuous in history, come crowding the memory as we

meditate on this theme. These have drunk the fullest cups of earthly riches, pleasures, fame, power, or glory, and if the perishing things of time could have yielded true happiness, they would have found it; but they testified that they sought and found it not. The cry from the multitude, betraying their dissatisfaction and their eagerness to try some new earthly object to slack their soul's thirst, rises louder and more imperious, after every fresh disappointment—"Who will show us any good?" Who will direct us to those good things that will assuage this burning pain at the heart's core, and give us peace and rest?

Natural thirst, we have seen, when the means are obtainable of slacking it, is not an evil, but a blessing; it is one of those benign agencies God has employed to minister to our temporal wellbeing. Soul-thirst, which nothing earthly can meet, is in itself a greater boon, as its promptings, if yielded to, lead to those living streams which minister to our everlasting wellbeing. Were the soul destitute of this great, deep, inward thirst, —we will not say which sinful pleasures, but—which all that is purest and loveliest, and most amiable and most noble, and most valuable of mere earthly objects could meet and fully gratify, then the soul would be a mere thing of earth, no better in the long-run than the brutes that perish, or the clods of the valley. This great, deep thirst of our being, that refuses to be satisfied with the things of time and sense, reveals the soul's greatness, its vast capacity, its likeness to its Maker, and its immortality.

It has been the *misfortune* of many to be the victims of unrelieved natural thirst; it is not the misfortune but

the *sin* of multitudes that they are tormented with the pangs of unrelieved soul-thirst, for they wilfully prefer poison to those heaven-provided waters, of which, if a man drink, he will be truly satisfied now and for ever. What a joyful sound is this: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

CHAPTER IV.

"COME."

WE have long been familiar with "Come"—the word of welcome. Ere our infant lips could lisp the sweet sound, we knew its meaning, and felt its power and charm. Thirsty and hungry, our eyes and mouths were wont to search for the living fountains, and great was our happiness as a mother's "Come" bid us welcome, and as she pressed us gently close and yet closer to her soft, warm breast. In our early years, when in pain or distress or sorrow, or trouble of any kind, no music, however melodious, could for a moment be compared with a mother's "Come." At its bidding, full of trust, we ran into her outstretched arms, and nestled in her loving bosom, and sweet was our sense of rest and bliss as she comforted us as a mother only can. We did not doubt her love or her willingness to relieve us, and without the least misgiving we cast our care upon her. Many a young man and many a young woman have known the priceless value of a wise and good father's "Come." He invited his sons and daughters, when they were in perplexity or difficulty or want, to come to him, and they took him at his word; they repaired to him

when they were in an emergency, and have not been disappointed, but been welcomed, and have received the guidance and help they desired, as far, at least, as it was in his power to bestow. Many of us have experienced the preciousness of having a friend specially qualified to aid us in certain cases of need. It may be long since he said to us, "Come to me," but we know he is saying it in his heart still. Like a mother or father's "Come," it is a standing invitation. We have repaired to him in faith. We have tried him, and found him true to his promise, and are ready, without doubting, to repair to him again, whenever we require his assistance. The text means a coming like this: like the infant or child to its mother, like the young man to his father, like one to his friend. The comer takes the inviter at his word, believes what he says, trusts him fully, has no doubt that he is both willing and able to fulfil his promises.

There are multitudes of true friends in the world for whom we thank God. Without them the world would be a wilderness, and there would be no lovely green spots on the earth, not one oasis in this desert. All, however, who profess themselves to be friends are not true ones. Many are more or less false. When we repair to them it is only to be disappointed. Their fair words of promise we find were merely words; they never intended them to be more. They may, perhaps, tell us that they forget ever having led us to hope that they would aid us. We refresh their memories, or even show them their own writing, bearing us out in all we say; and now they begin to get cross, try to explain, or explain away their own words; and, under one pretext or another, they get quit of us, and we go

away bitterly lamenting that we ever put faith in them, or allowed their fine speeches to raise hopes in our bosoms only to be thus rudely blasted. We expected that they were in earnest, and that with open hearts they would receive us, but when we came, we found their hearts shut against us. If their "Come" had not died out of their memory, it had died out of their heart, if ever it lived there. When we came to them, "Come" did not welcome us, but "Depart" drove us away from them.

God is not like such friends. He is a true friend, even the very God of truth, who cannot lie. When He says, "Come," He means it. Come at His bidding, and like all who ever came, you will find that He will do all He has said—fulfil all that He has promised. He is not a man that He should lie. Many, though quite sincere when they promise, yet fail to fulfil their promises. Mothers have been known to murder the infants they once fondly loved. Parents have been known to spurn from them sons and daughters whom they once tenderly cared for. Persons who have been trusted as friends, and who for a time were real friends, have afterwards been known to ruin those they promised to help. It is not so with our Heavenly Father, who says, "Come ye to the waters," for He never ceases to be willing. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. While the day of grace lasts, the time will never come when these blessed words shall not come true—"He willeth not that any should perish, but (willeth) that all should come unto Him and be saved." Fathers, mothers, friends may fail to fulfil their promises, not through lack of will, but through lack of ability. A mother's breasts may be dried up, while her heart beats

with even stronger affection than ever. The affecting sight has sometimes been witnessed of a mother asleep, and her infant, fondly believing that that mother's heart was still saying, "Come," repairing to the well-known fountain, but only to find that the warm, gushing stream that used to quench its thirst and gladden its little heart is dried up, and will not flow. Sons and daughters may repair in their time of need to their father, and find no change in his love, but that his circumstances have changed, and that he is now utterly unable to give them the help they need. And so, also, it happens sometimes with a friend. His heart is still true to us, but he has lost the ability to aid us, through the loss of his wealth or influence, or other causes. It is altogether otherwise with the Divine Promiser, as He can never become unable to make good His word. The fountain of bliss to which He bids us welcome can never be frozen or dried up; its waters flow on, and will never cease to flow. None have ever come here to drink in vain. God's ability, like His willingness to fulfil all His promises, never changes,—"He is willing, He is able" will never cease to be true while gospel ages roll. Take Him, then, at His word, believe what He says, trust Him fully, rely both on His willingness and His ability when He says, "Come ye to the waters"—that is, to the blessings of salvation which He has provided for you in the Gospel. Come here with the thirst of your soul, and you will find your agonising longing for peace and rest met and fully satisfied.

Coming is believing. You may come to an earthly friend without actually coming into his bodily presence. Your father may be both willing and able to fulfil his

promise to you; but he may be at a distance, a gulf may intervene between you and him which it is impracticable for you to pass, but you may, notwithstanding, avail yourself of his kind invitation, and come to him. You may come to him by letter or telegram, and so coming, receive from him all you wish. You may also come to your Heavenly Father by letting Him know your sense of need, and your desire to have it supplied. But in order to this it is not necessary that you write a letter or send a telegram. Believing prayer will reach Him far sooner than either letter or telegram could reach an earthly friend. Such prayer is coming. Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief. It is coming spiritually, and not bodily, that is meant. It is believing in the heart what God has promised, taking Him at His word, relying on His promise. Such believing or coming finds expression in prayer. You may even come without prayer. If a true earthly friend, one who is both willing and able to assist you, could see your heart, and witness there the faith you reposed in him, your sense of want, and the desire you felt for him to help you, he would at once supply your need. Letters and telegrams, and other outword means of communicating with him, could all be dispensed with. No earthly friend, however, can see the heart, but God can and does see it. The moment we truly believe in our hearts, put entire trust in God's word of promise, we come to Him. "With the heart man believeth." The waters to which we are invited to come, as we shall notice more fully in the next chapter, are the blessings of salvation, which flow from the heart of our Heavenly Father, through Christ, to all-comers. The

invitation, "Come ye to the waters," and the invitation of Jesus, "Come to me," are not different, but one and the same invitation. When our Heavenly Father invites us to come to the waters, He is inviting us to come to Jesus, who is the source or fountain-head whence these waters issue to refresh the weary and the thirsty. Whether, then, we come at the Father's or Christ's bidding, the meaning is the same. It is to Jesus we are to come. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

Sweet is the invitation. It is not "Go," but "Come." Easy are its terms. It is not, Do this or that, or, Give this or that, but simply, Come. Happy truly, and for ever happy, are all those who have come. The language of the comer is, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." It is strange, when the terms are so easy, that so few of those who receive the invitation come, or are even anxious to come. In most cases it is because they do not really feel their spiritual destitution, and their need of those blessings which alone can satisfy the cravings of their souls. When weary, we willingly avail ourselves of the seat that offers us rest; when thirsty, of the sparkling springs that offer to quench our thirst; when faint with the bright noonday sun, of the grateful shade that offers to screen us from the burning rays; when in debt, of him who offers to supply us with money; when in perplexity or difficulty, of the friend who offers to direct us. In none of these cases does "Come" require to be repeated often, nor to be urged upon us with extraordinary entreaty. Oh no! we are only too ready, when invited, to come to the seat, or the fountain, or the shade, or the man of money, or the friend willing to guide us. If sinners only felt

their need of pardon, of righteousness, of grace, of all spiritual blessings, the invitation to come for them where they are to be got would more frequently be obeyed than it is, and that without much pressing. But here the invitation is three times repeated (Isa. lv. 1), and yet how few there are who come. It is because few really feel their spiritual need. To poor sinners awakened to a sense of their sin and misery, "Come to Jesus" is the sweetest and most precious word that can fall on their ears, for in Him, if they come, they will find all that they truly need. O poor, wretched, miserable sinner! know that you are sinful, guilty, hell-deserving, and that, until you receive pardon and righteousness and grace, you cannot have your wretchedness removed, cannot have the thirst of your soul quenched. But all you need is to be found in Christ. Listen to His sweet invitation, "Come to me," and obey it. These are His own words—"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Are you one of those who are anxious to come, yet, notwithstanding the easy terms, feel, or suppose you feel, that you are not able to come. You feel difficulty in coming; yet we believe if you are really in earnest in trying to come, that your face is already towards Jesus. Pray for His Holy Spirit to help you to believe. Cease not crying, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Cease not praying and trying to come, until you are safe in the arms of Jesus. Jesus, seeing you willing to come, will help you by His Holy Spirit to come unto these loving arms of His. The fond mother is not more willing to welcome her infant to her bosom, nor the tender and affectionate father to receive back his prodigal but repentant son, than is

Jesus to receive and welcome you. As it is more blessed for the fond mother to give from her own breast that which satisfies the appetite and gladdens the heart of her babe than it is for the infant to receive, and as it is more blessed for the father to forgive his son and supply his wants than it is for the son to receive, so it is more blessed for Jesus to supply all our spiritual need than it can be for us poor sinners to receive His gifts. Deny Him not this blessedness. Come at His bidding. Doubt not His power or His willingness. Believe now on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and blest.

This "come" is connected with another "come,"—a "come," however, which belongs to the far, far distant future, a "come" which all who assemble around the great white throne would only too gladly respond to; but it will be addressed to those only who, while their day of grace lasted, obeyed the invitation of Jesus. Them only will it welcome. Their hearts, but those of no others, will the transporting word gladden on that great day. In their ears only will "come" be a joyful sound. "Come unto me, ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

With this blessed "Come" of the judgment-day another and awful word is associated, all the more awful because the same blessed lips that say "Come" will also pronounce this other but dreadful word, "Depart." "Depart from me, ye cursed." Oh! would it not have been better that this word had not been spoken by Jesus? Would it not have been better had we been able to meditate only on His sweet and beautiful words, and not have had the delightful harmony broken by such discordant sounds as,

"Depart from me, ye cursed"? Or at least would it not have been better not to have spoken this awful word until He was seated on the great white throne? No. For, harsh though it sounds, it is one of the kindest words He ever spake. But for it many might have indulged the vain hope that somehow all believers and unbelievers alike would have the option of responding to the joyful welcome, "Come," or at least that their day of grace would be prolonged; but this word—a word more awful than any that we or any mortal man can speak—this awful word "depart," which is no mere figure of speech, but the direct opposite of "come," dissipates all such vain dreams. None of those who have been accustomed to listen to the gospel message, and whose hearts will quake as this dread word falls on their ears, will be able to say, "Had I been forewarned that this doom-word would be pronounced on this solemn occasion, I would have come to Jesus."

Unbelieving sinner, it is well for you that this word reaches your ears now, and not from the throne of judgment, but from the throne of grace. In mercy and love, Jesus has spoken this word beforehand—spoken it not to condemn you, not to banish you from His gracious presence, not to prevent you partaking of the blessings of salvation, which are at His disposal; but He has spoken it beforehand, that it may awaken your fears ere it be too late, and may induce you now to come at His bidding to Himself for all needed spiritual blessings. On the last day its mission will be the very opposite of "come," but now its blessed mission is identical with "come." It is true, "come" is a sweet, winsome word, proceeding direct from the very heart of Jesus, and would draw you, as it were, with cords

of love,—while "depart" would rather seem to seek to act on you from behind, and, as it were, drive you to the Saviour; but both *come* and *depart,* if you will be taught by them, will unite their influence to bring you to Jesus' bosom; and here, if you come, you will find rest to your weary soul, and that which, truly and for ever, will satisfy your thirsting heart. The fountain of blessing in Jesus' bosom never runs dry. Here, if you come, now and for ever, you may draw water joyfully out of this, the Well of Salvation.

CHAPTER V.

"COME TO THE WATERS."

IN the wide universe there is nothing so valuable as these waters. This is apparent, if either the price they cost, or the blessedness experienced by their recipients, is considered. They have been purchased, not with gold or silver or diamonds, or even with all that this great globe contains, but with the precious blood of Christ; and the peace that passeth understanding, and the joy which neither life nor death can destroy, can be imparted only by them.

These spiritual waters include not only the influences of the Holy Spirit, but also all the other benefits that flow to believers from the atoning death of Christ. We cannot conceive of these influences and benefits being separated in quenching the thirst of the soul; for if the Holy Spirit is the agent in this gracious work, He effects His design by taking of the things which are Christ's and showing them to us.

With Scripture writers, water is a favourite emblem of the blessings of salvation, and a very beautiful and striking emblem it is. Between them and it there are strong points of resemblance.

1. As water is indispensably necessary to quench bodily thirst, so are the blessings of salvation to assuage spiritual thirst. We are sinful and guilty by nature, and need pardon. Without this blessing we can never know true peace. Pardon can be obtained only by coming to Jesus. His blood, His alone, can cleanse from sin, and become the ground of forgiveness. To every one whose conscience is sprinkled with His precious blood, and to no others, there comes rolling down from the bosom of our Heavenly Father the joyful sound of glad tidings of great joy,—"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions." Pardon is very precious, but of itself it is not enough to meet our soul's need. We have broken the holy law of God, and are unable to obey it perfectly; and even were we able to render an obedience equal to that of the best and holiest men who have lived on earth, our righteousness, after all, would be but filthy garments. We need a perfect spotless righteousness. Pardon delivers from the wrath and curse of God, and from hell, but it does not entitle us to eternal life, nor can it set open for us the gates of Paradise. We need righteousness. This precious gift is also to be obtained by coming to Jesus, who not only died to redeem us from the curse of the law, but also perfectly obeyed all its precepts, that He might become the Lord our righteousness. This is the only righteousness that can justify, and it is unto and upon all them that believe, and entitles them to eternal life, and to all the rewards of obedience. Clothed in this spotless and beautiful robe, heaven's gates will open wide to admit us when we die. We need no other pass to the realms of bliss.

Pardon and righteousness are great and invaluable gifts, but they are not sufficient of themselves to fully meet our soul's need, and entirely satisfy our spiritual thirst. We need also the spirit of adoption, and the privileges of children, for by nature we are the children of wrath. We can never be truly happy until we are able to look up into the smiling face of our God, and say, Abba, Father. This gift, like the others, is to be had by coming to Jesus, "for as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

Pardon, righteousness, adoption, how very precious these are; how indispensable they are to the welfare of our souls; but they are not enough to meet all our spiritual want. Our hearts and our lives are impure, and we need not only pardon and righteousness and sonship—we also need holiness. Without holiness, a title to eternal life and the privileges of children would be but a barren gift. Without holiness heaven would be no heaven to us. We could not mingle in its society, nor enjoy its pure springs of happiness. Bitter to our taste would be those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. Holiness, as well as other blessings, is to be obtained by coming to Jesus, for He died not only to redeem us from the curse of the law, but also that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. This work of sanctification He effects by sending the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all who believe in Him, to enable them to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. This blessed work of grace, which is begun at the new birth, the Word of God assures us,

will be carried on until it is completed; and when it is completed, its subjects will pass into glory. Believers, when they enter heaven, are not only clothed in the spotless robes of Immanuel's righteousness, but inwardly are perfectly holy, and have thus become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. These,—justification, which includes pardon and righteousness,—adoption, and sanctification are the three great benefits which Christ's death has secured to His believing people. There are other benefits, but these are the great outstanding ones, which rise up from the gospel plain like three great mountains, each standing apart in its solitary glory, though uniting together below. Each distinct and different from the others are these three great gospel benefits, yet they are all united; they are one, and all spring from the same deep, everlasting covenant, even from the mercy of Him who so "loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Without these gospel blessings you must remain for ever wretched and miserable, and your thirst for happiness be for ever unassuaged. If you would have true peace and lasting joy, a joy that will remain with you through all the vicissitudes of life, and which death itself will fail to destroy; and if hereafter and for ever you would be truly happy, you must come to Jesus now, and have your need supplied with peace-giving and life-sustaining blessings. We are invited to come to Him, for He is the fountain of blessing. Coming to Him, believing on His name, trusting His word, we receive all we need out of His fulness—pardon, righteousness, sonship, grace, peace, joy, and the hope of glory, and all else

necessary to make us truly happy now and for ever. Our need is great, but being called into His kingdom, not too great for the mercy of our God to supply out of His bounty, for He is able to supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. By faith or believing, we receive Christ Himself, God's unspeakable gift, a gift through which all other gifts flow. Having Christ, the child of God feels he has all things, all he needs to fill his heart and fully satisfy his desires. He needs no more. He has found in Christ the well-spring of his spiritual life, he has drunk of those living waters which issue from it, and of which if a man drink, as Christ says, he shall thirst no more. The language of his soul now is, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." In the hour of trial, in the season of deepest affliction, in the agonies of death, these streams of salvation have never failed to refresh and sustain the soul.

Some years ago, a number of missionaries who sought a mission-field on the inhospitable shores of Patagonia, endured great sufferings there from hunger and thirst. They were utterly unable to obtain water and food, and died at last from sheer want of these necessaries of life. They died, one after another, a slow, lingering, terrible death, and yet their souls were all the while drinking deep, deeper than ever before out of the wells of salvation, as the records they left behind them amply testify. The following words were found written on paper beside their whitening bones:—Our hearts and our flesh faint and fail, but God is the strength of our heart and our portion for ever.

"Whosoever," saith Christ, "drinketh of this water

(natural water) shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Those who drink of this living water shall no more thirst, like the poor thirsty traveller in the desert who is dying in great distress because he can find no water. They shall not thirst in this sense, for they have found the refreshing streams. Nor shall they thirst like one who has found a well and quenched his thirst with its waters, but who, at another stage of his journey, is again afflicted with grievous thirst, and must retrace his steps to the well, or find another ere he can satisfy his craving. They shall not thirst in this sense, for between them and the living fountain a connection has been formed, so that, at any moment, they can draw ever new and fresh supplies. With this connection a believer's soul can never be absolutely destitute of soul-refreshing and soul-sustaining blessings. They are within him "a well of water springing up into eternal life." Nor shall they thirst any more, like the man who is striving with all his might to assuage his soul's thirst with the perishing things of time, but who finds, in his sad experience, that these cannot satisfy the craving of his heart and give him true peace and rest, but leave him, even when he succeeds in obtaining the objects of his pursuit, unhappy, sometimes even more restless, dissatisfied, and miserable than ever. They shall thirst no more in this sense, for they have experienced the efficacy of the waters of which they have been drinking to meet all the wants and satisfy to the full all the longings of their immortal nature.

No, they shall thirst no more in any of these senses, but there is, blessed be God, a sense in which they will

continue to thirst for the blessings of salvation. They shall continue to have a delightful and healthful appetite for these living waters. To cease to thirst in this sense would be an indication of death and not life. Ye who have once come to the waters and found salvation by drinking them, are invited, and welcome to come, without ceasing. Come, that you may have an ever-increasing lively sense of the blessedness of pardon, of the preciousness of the beauteous robe of righteousness, and of the greatness of the privileges of children. Come, that you may receive more abundant outpouring of the influences of the Holy Spirit, so that your spiritual life may be quickened, so that your joy and peace may abound more and more, and so that you may be enabled daily to grow in grace and in meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

2. The blessings of salvation, like water, are abundant. There are some desert places in the world where water is scarce, and even in cities and towns there is sometimes a short supply; but, in general, of water there is great store almost everywhere. Next to the air we breathe, it is the most plentiful thing in nature. The word in the text is in the plural, "waters," and does not suggest scarcity, but overflowing streams. Had gospel blessings been limited and restricted, and not abundant like such natural supplies as these, many poor sinners, when convicted of sin, and feeling their need of salvation, might have feared or refused to come to the Saviour, not believing, or at least doubting, that there could be enough of living water for them. But none will ever be able to plead this excuse, for there is ever enough and to spare

for all who thirst. The supply is inexhaustible. It is like a sea without a shore, or an ocean without a bottom, unbounded, unlimited. Millions upon millions have already drunk here and been satisfied, and millions more are invited to come and drink, that they may thirst no more. Yes, all the thirsting children of men are invited to come. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

There is no limit to the number of sinners that, coming to Jesus, will receive forgiveness of sins, the beautiful robe of righteousness, and grace to enable them to put off the old man and to put on the new man, to subdue all their spiritual foes, and to go on in the divine life, until they are meet for the heavenly inheritance. We say, there is no limit to the number of sinners that, coming to Jesus, will receive these and all other needful spiritual blessings, and receiving them, have the thirst of their souls fully and for ever satisfied. Christ is a well-spring of grace that will never run dry, but will be for ever overflowing, however many the comers may be. There is none of the thirsting children of men to whom this invitation is not addressed—"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

It sometimes happens that there is unpleasantness between the millers on the banks of a stream and the inhabitants of the villages or towns by which it flows. The more the miller gets there is the less for them, and sometimes not enough for their wants. Even in cities supplied from great sources, there is occasionally a scarcity. We resided for some time in a flat in one of the streets of a large city, and often had an insufficient quantity of this necessary of life. Our supply to a great extent depended on our neighbours below, for it was the same pipe that

led to our cistern which led to theirs, and only so much pressure was put on at the main, at certain intervals, as was deemed sufficient to fill the cisterns once in twenty-four hours. This was with a view, in a time of scarcity, to economise the general supply. In our circumstances, if our neighbours below us were careful to use only what was required to fill their cisterns, we might get ours filled also, or at least nearly filled; but if they were thoughtless or selfish, and did not duly consider us, but used their supply without stint, and drew water largely while their cisterns were filling, we got very little, and frequently, on this account, we got none at all. The millers on the stream, getting beyond a certain quantity of its waters, impoverished the supply for the dwellers in the neighbouring towns and villages, and our friends below us, getting beyond a certain quantity, lessened or took away altogether the supply that should have come to us.

It is altogether different with the sources of the living waters and the mode of their distribution. Giving doth not impoverish the great Giver, neither doth withholding enrich Him. A sinner coming to Jesus and receiving out of His fulness will not prevent those who follow after him from being blessed. One meeting or church or assembly of believers, in answer to prayer, receiving abundance out of the fountain of living waters will not in the least interfere with or lessen the supply to other thirsting and praying companies of God's people. If it did, how would the prayers of God's children be discouraged! If blessings descending on us in a certain meeting or city would diminish the supply to those in other meetings or in other cities, and prevent them receiving like precious

blessings, or diminish their supply, with what painful feelings we would approach the throne of grace, and how would selfishness be apt to take root in our souls, and our interest in the spiritual welfare of others be in danger of ceasing! But, blessed be God, it is not so. There is ever an ample and constant supply for all the thirsting children of men. Abundant blessings being showered down upon us can never lessen the infinite store that is free to God's praying people everywhere.

If the supply is inexhaustible, how is it that so many of God's professing people are not now enjoying abundant blessings? It is, in most cases, because they are not abounding in prayer. If blessings are to descend into our souls, we must come for them to the source whence they flow. "Come ye to the waters." It is by prayer, as well as by reading and hearing the Word, we are to come. Jesus Himself, when on earth, we believe, seldom if ever received blessings from above except in answer to prayer. In the account of His baptism, when the heavens were opened and the Spirit in a bodily shape descended upon Him, and the voice came rolling down from His Father in heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son," neither Matthew nor Mark nor John informs us that all these signal tokens of favour were granted in answer to prayer, but Luke does: "Praying, the heavens were opened" (Luke iii. 5). Yes, to Jesus, prayer opened the heavens, and if we would have them opened to us, we must follow His example, or they will remain brass above us. Let us, then, in order to be abundantly blessed, be instant in prayer. Let us ever seek to be obeying the apostolic injunction: "Pray without ceasing."

Some who, in charity, must be classed among praying disciples are sometimes found complaining that they are not being refreshed like others. They are not sensible, they say, of the Spirit's gracious influences in large measure entering into their souls. If this be your case, the fault, be assured, is not in the source of supply, nor in the mode of its distribution. It is not because others are receiving so much that you are receiving so little. The fault must be in yourself. See that you are not narrowing the channels within yourself through which gracious influences flow into the soul.

In the time of a general scarcity of water in one of our great cities, there was a self-contained house that was receiving a much smaller supply than houses of the same class in the same street. The occupants of this dwelling, two ladies, complained to the officers of the water company, who sent competent men to try to discover the cause. They found the pressure on the main from which this house drew its supply as great as that of the other houses, and also found the pipes and cistern in it all in complete order. The ladies were indignant. The company or their men were deceiving them. They must have put too little pressure on at the main, or put strictures in the pipes, or something else to diminish the supply they ought to get. They procured a cab and drove to the water company's office. With great volubility they poured out their complaint, in very angry tones, to the surveyor. When he tried to explain or deny that it could be the company's fault, he was immediately stopped by the angry tongues of the ladies. At last, he went to a press and brought from it a piece of old pipe with a bend

or angle about the middle. He held up this before them, until they were silent, and then proceeded to give them its history. A public company, he said, made a similar complaint to yours. They were getting scarcely any water into their premises, and very serious consequences were likely to ensue. The water company had done all they could. There was ample pressure at the main. At considerable expense, the aggrieved party got their own pipes beneath their offices examined, for above ground and in their premises they were faultless. Well, after a great deal of work turning up the earth and getting down to the pipes, *this*,—again holding up before the ladies the piece of pipe,—this part of pipe was found in the condition you now see. Here, at the bend or angle, there was scarcely room for the water to pass. Something or other had pressed the sides of the pipe together at this point, and this was the sole cause of so little water getting into the company's premises. "The fault you see, was in there own pipes and not in ours. Your case may be a similar one to this. Get the pipes below your house and your grounds examined."

So look you not only on the surface of your life, but search down into your heart, and see if there be anything there restricting the channels through which grace flows into a believer's soul. Is it a spirit of jealousy towards some brother or sister? Is it some want of charity you have for some one? Is it some grudge you cherish towards your neighbour? Is it an unwillingness you feel to forgive a brother who has offended you? Is it some idol for which you are cherishing a secret affection rather than crucifying it? Is it one or other of these,

or some other sin deep down in your heart that you are unwilling to entirely root up? Such sins, though it may be not very observable on the surface of your life, act like strictures in the channels within you, which connect your soul with the living fountains of waters. There is no lack in Jesus. All around you, as you admit, the heavens are open, and showers of blessings are falling. It is these strictures in yourself that are preventing you from receiving abundantly. You are straitened in yourself. Seek, by God's help, to remove these hindrances, and then blessings, like a stream, will flow into your soul. And you shall be quickened and satisfied, made glad and to sing for joy.

3. Like water, the blessings of salvation are free. Water is one of the freest of the necessaries of life. Generally, we may drink as much as we please, free of cost. Seldom are we at a loss to procure what shall quench our thirst for nothing. The blessings of salvation are also free. Were it otherwise they would be utterly beyond our reach, for we could never be able to pay the price necessary to obtain them. But no charge is demanded. The terms are simply, come—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

CHAPTER VI.

"HE THAT HATH NO MONEY, COME."

THE Hebrew word for "silver" is properly rendered "money" in the text. Silver was the only metal used as money by the Hebrews up to the period of the Exodus, and after that, even down to the time when Jesus appeared in our world, it appears to have been chiefly so employed; hence our equivalent for the "silver" of the Hebrews is money.

The invitation, "Come ye to the waters," implies that the blessings of salvation are free, and the words, "And he that hath no money," do not proclaim another, but more distinctly declare and emphasise the same glorious truth. This is no vain repetition. One of the most difficult lessons which the poor sinner, convicted of sin, agonising under a load of guilt, and anxiously asking the question of questions, "What must I do to be saved," has to learn is, that salvation is to be obtained, and can only be obtained, gratuitously. The Spirit of God perceiving this great difficulty, which so often perplexes the awakened, accounts for the frequency with which this aspect of salvation is presented in Scripture. Nowhere in the Word of God is it more impressively taught than

in the opening verses of our chapter (Isa. lv.) Here, on this point, we have literally line upon line; and the line we are now considering, "He that hath no money, come," is the most clear and emphatic of them all.

By obliterating one little word from this line, it ceases to be the Gospel's, and becomes the world's great invitation, which is, "He that hath money, come." In itself this is not a wrong or sinful cry, for the affairs of this life could not go on without money. Were it to disappear, inextricable confusion would follow. Enthusiasts professing to have a soul above money have sometimes clubbed together, determined to live and die without conforming to the world in this respect; but abject failure has invariably followed all such foolish attempts.

Very soon in life we learned the magic of the words—"He that hath money, come." On the bright and beautiful toys that fascinated our youthful eyes, and which we so greatly desired to possess and make playthings of, and on the multitude of nice things that tempted our appetite, and which we hungered to taste—little things when we look back to them, but great in our estimation then—were written in capital letters, which we had no difficulty in reading—"He that hath money, come." As we grew in years, and new objects became the subject of our desires, we found glittering on them all the same golden words. On almost all the temporal things we need, desire, or covet through life's journey, this money invitation is inscribed. It meets us at every step. What miles of shops in our towns and cities. In every window what an endless display of valuable and inviting articles. Some beautiful to the eye, some delicious to the taste;

some appealing to our need, some to our pride, and some to our vanity; some that are indispensable to our temporal welfare, and some that we could very well get through life without; but on one and all of them the words, "He that hath money, come," shine conspicuously. In what town or village of the world will you find a shop whose goods are marked, "He that hath no money, come"? A moneyless person looking into a shop window might observe pleasant faces beyond its attractions inviting him to come within; if he takes the hint, and makes for the door, it springs open as if by instinct, and, on entering, he is bowed to and led to this or that smiling young man or woman, who is ready to offer him whatever he fancies; but the moment it becomes known that he has no money, the countenances of these polite shopkeepers are changed, and they have no longer even a civil tongue in their head. They all unite to extrude him unceremoniously from the premises. He has no money, and for this reason he is not wanted.

Money is the grand medium of exchange. He that has money, and in proportion to the amount he possesses, can procure the good things of this world. With plenty of money, it is easy to obtain the necessaries and luxuries of life, either at home or abroad. Without money, or what is convertible into money, we should be absolutely destitute. Were we transported into some great and distant city, cut off from communication with our native country, without a single farthing of money, or anything we could exchange for money, we should realise the absolute destitution and misery of the man "that hath no money."

As yet, we have been alluding mainly to the legitimate

place and power of money. The greatness of these have led multitudes in all ages, in innumerable ways, to abuse this indispensable thing called money. Some, like the miser, hoard and worship it, for its own sake; some, like the spendthrift, squander it recklessly; some make it minister to their pride, and some to their sinful lusts and pleasures. Legion is the number of those who are unduly swayed by money. Over and above the attention that is due to a customer who is able to pay for what he purchases in a shop, is there not too often an undue deference and obsequious attention given to the person who is known to be very wealthy? Is he not welcomed with more than ordinary partiality? In a word, is he not worshipped for his money's sake? In many churches and chapels, too, are the rich not more warmly welcomed and cared for than the poor? The reproof of the Apostle James (chap. ii. 1-5) has not ceased to be needed in our days. Yes, we are afraid that even within the sacred precincts of the sanctuary, the welcome "Come," given to the wealthy, sometimes is tantamount to worshipping them for the sake of their gold. In the matrimonial market, money is frequently preferred to every other consideration. How many desirable, marriageable ladies and gentlemen, disguise it as they may, are virtually saying, "He or she that has money, come." Time would fail us to recount the endless forms in which money is abused and worshipped.

An eccentric old man was in the custom of taking off his hat and walking bareheaded whenever he chanced to be passing a bank. A gentleman, whose curiosity was excited, ventured one day to accost the old man, and

politely asked if he would explain the reason why he so acted. "Oh yes," replied the old man, "I was once very rich, and almost everybody I met took off his hat to me. But I have lost all my wealth, and have become very poor, and no one now takes off his hat to me. I have come to the conclusion that the people long ago were respecting and worshipping not me but my money, and so in taking off my hat to these banks, I am practising the lesson I have been taught." This may be called an extreme case, but who will venture to deny that there is too much of this sort of thing in the world, and that the evil leaven prevails to some extent even in the Church itself?

Money, then, in respect both to its use and abuse, is a mighty power in the world. The world's great cry is—"He that hath money, come." The gospel invitation is the very opposite. It is—"He that hath no money, come." On all the good things, as well as on all the evil things of this world, are inscribed—"He that hath money, come;" but on all the gospel benefits we read the gracious words—"He that hath no money, come." Pardon, peace, righteousness, holiness, eternal life, all the blessings that are included in grace now and glory hereafter, have written on them—"He that hath no money, come." Not one of them is to be found without this beautiful and inviting inscription. Here, if anywhere, the rich and the poor meet together. The poorest beggar in the world may have all these great and precious benefits, for he needs not to come with money; and the man of wealth must leave his riches behind him when he comes, if he would obtain them. From the shops we would be

turned out if we had no money, and without carrying with us any of their commodities; but the very reverse of this is the case with respect to gospel stores, for in coming to Jesus for the gifts He has to bestow, we must come without money, or we shall not receive them. If the poor man come with a few farthings, and the rich man with tens of millions of pounds sterling, both alike would have to depart without receiving a blessing. Neither of them is wanted here. It is he, and he only, that hath no money who is invited to come.

If salvation were purchasable with, and if the degree of blessedness of the saved depended on money, what a sad state of things would arise! If multitudes are now sacrificing health, ease, sleep, mind, and soul for gold, which, at the best, can only procure the perishing things of time, how greatly these multitudes would increase, and how awfully intensified the burning passion for money would become, if salvation could be got for gold. What excuses, and not unreasonable ones, would then be framed by millions and tens of millions of people for their eager, restless, passionate, and unremitting toils to get money, and for the neglect of their own bodily and temporal welfare, and that of those dependent on them. "We must get money," they would say, "at all hazards, for the salvation of our own souls and of the souls of our children depends on it." How wisely it has been ordered by Him who doeth all things well, that salvation is free, and bears the inscription—"He that hath no money, come."

Although it is quite true, as we have been remarking, that literal money cannot purchase salvation, yet it is not

such money, or mainly, that is meant in our text. "Money" here, like "thirst," "waters," "buy," "wine," and "milk," is an image or figurative expression. It means, merit. As with money we procure the goods of this life, so with merit or self-righteousness men often vainly try to purchase God's favour. They are moved by the words, "Do this and live." "No money" here signifies complete spiritual destitution. The person who has no money, and nothing which he can convert into money, and no friends from whom he can obtain either, is absolutely destitute. In this sense, "He that hath no money," is the most graphic and concentrated description that could be drawn of one utterly destitute. What we are taught by this figure is, that sinners must be convinced of their utter spiritual destitution, ere they come to Jesus to be saved. "I am poor and needy;" "I have nothing and need all things," is the spirit in which a sinner, if he would be saved and blest, must come. He must come feeling that he is in darkness, and needs light,—is guilty, and needs pardon,—is unable to keep the law, and needs eternal life, —is sinful and vile, and needs purity,—is weak, and needs strength to enable him to walk in the path that leads to glory, and that he has no merit of his own whereby he can procure these and all other spiritual benefits that are necessary to his soul's salvation. While he labours under the delusion that anything which he can give, or do, can avail in any degree in obtaining the blessings his soul needs, the way is barred between him and the Saviour. It is not till he comes to see that he has no money—that is, no merit or righteousness of his own—that the barrier is removed that intercepts his way to Jesus. Very difficult

it is for poor sinners to learn this lesson. Days and months, and sometimes years, are spent by awakened sinners in labouring to have some merit of their own, or some equivalent, or at least some good thing or quality to offer when they come to Jesus, as a plea to obtain from Him the blessings their souls need. What strivings some have to keep evil thoughts out of the mind, and evil desires out of the heart, and evil words from issuing out of the lips! What efforts they make to obey the commandments, to love God with all their heart, and their neighbours as themselves! Some seek by reading so many chapters, by praying so many times a-day, and by other religious exercises, to work out a righteousness that will commend them to God; but all such efforts to obtain salvation thus are in vain, in direct opposition to the words of our theme, and to the whole tenor of Scripture. It is he, and he only, who hath no money—that is, no merit of his own—who is invited to come to Jesus. Convicted, trembling sinner, come to Jesus. Believe God's Word. Come, just as you are, without money, without any merit or righteousness of your own, and you will be welcome.

Some time since, we read a tract giving an account of the conversion of a very great sinner. He was a cripple, and greatly addicted to swearing. He used to say that he could not sin like other men, but he would excel them in swearing. He succeeded in his aim, being known for miles around as the greatest violator of the third commandment. The future did not alarm him. He felt confident that as God had, as he thought, sufficiently punished him in this world for his sins in causing him to be cripple,

He would not be so unjust as to punish him over again, after he died. One day, he was seized with sudden illness, and neither he nor his friends expected that he would recover. At first he thought, as he was accustomed to think, that he had nothing to fear. God would never be so unjust as to punish him twice over for his sins. Another thought, however, darted into his mind. It was, "What good thing have I done to entitle me to enter heaven?" His conscience answered, None; and he said to himself, There is only another place to which I can go. He now felt as if he were about to fall into the place of woe. He was greatly alarmed, and shook all over. In this state he cried earnestly to God. He said to Him—"I do not know if there is any way by which so great a sinner as I am can be saved, but if you spare my life, I will live a very different life than I have been doing. I will read twenty chapters daily. David prayed three times a-day, but I will pray seven times a-day." He did recover, and did not forget his vows. He regularly read twenty chapters of the Bible daily, and by the aid of an English prayer-book, prayed seven times a-day. But instead of obtaining peace to his troubled soul, his distress increased. The more he read and prayed, the more sinful he felt himself to be, and the more trouble he experienced from such passages as, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." "God is angry with the wicked every day." In this state of mind he read the whole Bible nearly twice over. But in coming the second time to the passage, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," the scales fell from off his eyes; he saw that his praying and reading the Scriptures

and efforts to cease from sinning could not save his soul, and that it was not on account of his own, but Jesus' merits that he could obtain salvation. Now he came without any money, without any merit or self-righteousness, and saying, as he came—

> "Just as I am, without one plea,
> But that Thy blood was shed for me."

And now he found peace and rest. He continued to pray and read the Scriptures, but not now for merit, or as the ground on which to obtain salvation, but as means—blessed means of grace. So diligent was he in the use of these, that from being the greatest sinner in the neighbourhood he became the most noted saint, and the most legible epistle of Jesus Christ. Ministers and other Christians from distant places came to see this trophy of Divine grace, and to be edified by his godly converse.

Not long ago we read in the newspapers the sad case of a widow who was brought before the police court on a charge of murdering her infant child. She stated that she had not a single farthing nor a single friend in the world. The last article which she possessed that was convertible into money—her apron—she had sold, the day before, for twopence, and that was now spent, and she was absolutely destitute ere she committed the crime. This was no valid excuse for taking the life of her child; but we mention the case as an illustration of utter destitution. As long as this woman had a little money, or anything, however trifling, that could be turned into money, she was not entirely destitute, but when the last article she had in

the world was exchanged for two coppers, and these were spent, she had no money, and was utterly destitute. There was plenty of what she needed in abundance all around, but she could not supply her wants, for she had no money —not so much as to buy a morsel of bread.

It is altogether different in respect to awakened sinners, for the blessings they need cannot be obtained by them until they come to feel spiritually what this wretched woman felt with respect to her temporal condition. They must feel that they are absolutely destitute—that they have no money, no merit, no righteousness—have nothing, and yet need all things; and that by coming to Jesus they can have their spiritual wants supplied. "He that hath no money, come."

A young woman who was a domestic servant in the north of Scotland had a quarrel with her mistress, and was dismissed from her situation. We are not aware which of them was in the fault. With what little money she had she travelled to London, walking the most of the way, and expecting to find occupation in the great city. In this she failed. She had no written character, and this was the great obstacle in the way of succeeding. She had not a single friend, and could find no one to advise or help, and was ignorant of any way by which she could save herself from starvation. When for bed and board she had spent her last penny, she began to part with her dress. Article after article was exchanged for money, in order that she might buy bread, until nothing was left but the rag that covered her nakedness; and now she felt that she had no money, and was absolutely destitute. She had no money; and that meant no bed, no

clothing, no food. There were beds, and plenty of them; but, as far as she knew, "He that hath money" was written on them all. There were provisions in abundance in hundreds of shops all around her, but on all them the same distressing words were inscribed—"He that hath money, come." She shivered with cold in her ragged gown, while warm clothing was spread out in fine windows in every direction; but the same despairing words—"He that hath money, come," were written on it all. Shut out as she was of every shop and lodging-house in London, reason reeled on its throne, and she sought relief in her sorrow in the cold bosom of the Thames. When she came to have no money, she knew and felt that she could not obtain any of the things she needed, not so much as a crust of bread; but sinners, on the contrary, must feel spiritually as she felt with respect to her temporal wants ere they can obtain the blessings they need. They must feel that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and that they have nothing, and need all things. They must feel that they have no merit, absolutely nothing with which they can purchase the blessings of salvation, or offer as an equivalent for them. They must so feel ere they come to Jesus; for on all the gifts which He has to bestow—on pardon, and peace, and joy, and righteousness, and eternal life, we read, "He that hath no money, come."

O poor sinners! you who have been convicted of sin; you who are anxious about your souls' salvation; you who have determined to give yourselves no peace till God's Spirit witness with your spirit that you have passed from death unto life; you who are striving to be less sinful before

you come to Jesus for pardon and for a better righteousness than your own; you who are striving in some measure at least to become holy before you come to Him who died to redeem all who put their trust in Him, from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people—for you specially, and for you in particular *this* line, this precious, winsome, hopeful line—"He that hath no money, come," has been written. All these efforts of yours are the money, merit, or righteousness with which you are striving to obtain salvation; but they all lead, not to, but *away from* Jesus. For he, and he only, that hath no money is invited to come. Cease to trust in anything in yourself, or in anything which you can do. Come as you are—guilty, vile, polluted, hell-deserving; and coming thus, you will receive all you need. Come, sensible that spiritually you are as poor as the widow was when she had spent the *twopence* for which she had parted with her apron, or as the young woman was on the evening she drowned herself. Come, sensible that you have nothing, and that you need all things. On these all things, yes, on every one of them is inscribed, "He that hath no money, come." On Him the source of all blessing, on Him the fountain of living waters, the gospel invitation —"He that hath no money," is ever shining. If we could come to Jesus, bringing along with us money, or merit, or self-righteousness, and thereby obtain salvation, Christ would no longer be God's unspeakable gift. Come, come without money. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will be yours, God's gift to you; and receiving Him, you will receive all you need—pardon, peace, rightousness, eternal life; yea, all you need to satisfy, and

to the full, the longings of your immortal souls. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

CHAPTER VII.

"BUY AND EAT."

BUY—that is, buy bread, and eat. Bread, the staff of life, stands for food in general. "Give us this day our daily bread." Bread and water are representative of those temporal good things by partaking of which our bodily frames are sustained. "His bread shall be given him; his water shall be sure." Both are employed in this verse (Isa. lv. 1) as emblems of salvation. What bread and water are to the body, the blessings of salvation are to the soul. The special aspect of these blessings symbolised by water is that they, and they only, can satisfy the thirst of the soul; and the special aspect of the blessings symbolised by bread is that they, and they only, can nourish, and sustain, and build up to maturity the new life that is begun in a believer's soul. As without bread and water our bodies would soon die, so without spiritual blessings our souls must perish. Christ, God's unspeakable gift—a gift that includes all others—is not only the water of which thirsty souls must drink if they would be satisfied, but is also the bread of which they must eat if they would grow spiritually, and attain at last to the stature of perfect men. How are we to obtain this

water, and this bread? Simply by coming. Yet here we are invited not only to come, but also to buy and eat. Coming to, or believing in Jesus, doubtless, includes all that is meant to be taught us by buying and eating; but as coming, buying, and eating are all distinguishable from each other in the affairs of this life, and as one may come and yet not buy, and another may come and buy and yet not eat, so here coming, buying, and eating are employed as images of different elements of true faith. It is not enough that we come to the stores where bread is sold; we must buy, and by buying get possession of some of that bread, if we would save ourselves from starvation. So, true faith is not a mere coming to Jesus, without getting possession of any benefits, if such a coming were possible; but it is a coming and buying, and by buying, getting possession of the blessings which are at His disposal. Come ye, buy. Having no money, or merit, or righteousness of our own, it is evident we cannot buy in the ordinary way, by giving an equivalent for what we receive. The paradoxical language employed here is designed to set forth the absolute, gratuitous nature of salvation. Buy figuratively denotes that exercise of the soul whereby it accepts or takes possession of Christ as freely offered to us in the Gospel, so that He becomes ours as really as any article that has been bought and paid for becomes the property of the buyer. The language of every true believer's soul is, "My Beloved is mine."

We are invited not only to buy but also to eat. Buy and eat. One may come to the bread store and buy, and by buying get possession of bread, but it will not nourish his body or save him from starvation unless he eat it. If

we could come to Jesus and receive from Him the spiritual gifts which are at His disposal, so that they became ours, as water may be ours without drinking it, or bread may be ours without eating it, these spiritual gifts would not benefit our souls. We must come, and coming, buy, and buying, eat—that is, so partake of this spiritual bread that it will as really support and build up our spiritual life, as bread when eaten supports and builds up our bodily frame. By a continuous exercise of faith in Christ, by meditating on His Divine person, on His incarnation, on His life, character, and sufferings, and on the benefits He has secured to believers by His righteousness and death, and by receiving into our souls in answer to prayer out of His fulness grace for grace; by all these and other exercises, the Holy Spirit helping us, our souls eat or partake of Christ, and are as really fed, nourished, strengthened, and their growth promoted, as our bodies are by eating our daily bread. By eating the bread of life, our faith is strengthened, our humility is deepened, our holiness is advanced, our love to Christ and His people burns more ardently, our hopes of heaven are brightened, and our meetness for it increased.

There is a stage in our temporal life when food, though it sustains, ceases to promote the growth of our bodies, and a stage is at last reached when it altogether fails to sustain life, and death ensues. But no stage is ever reached in a believer's life when the bread on which his soul feeds will cease to increase the strength and promote the growth of his spiritual life. Believers go on for ever, from strength to strength. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing."

The food we eat, by various wonderful processes, is converted into the vital blood that, flowing through innumerable channels, carries health and healing and strength and growth to the whole body, even to its most minute and extreme parts. But this food has no power of assimilating us into its own likeness, nor would this be desirable. The believer's soul, on the other hand, by partaking of the living bread is transformed into the very image of Him who has said: "I am the bread of life." "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Are you a buyer and an eater of this bread? If not, you have not yet truly come to Jesus, for faith in Him implies that the comer is poor and needy, and comes to Him for salvation. Unless you know that you have received blessings from Him which are as really yours as anything you have bought and paid for is yours, and that these blessings are as really promoting a work of grace in your souls as the food you eat ministers to the health and wellbeing of your body, you have no evidence that you are a child of God. Give heed, we entreat you, to the invitation that is now in mercy falling on your ears: "Come ye, buy and eat." Buy and eat, if you would live spiritually, and save your soul from eternal death.

If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, how thankful you should be for the inexhaustible store of provisions prepared for your spiritual wants. These wants of yours are very great, but are not, and never can be too great for the bounty of God to meet, for He is able to "supply all your need, according to his riches in glory

by Christ Jesus." And how thankful you should be for the warm welcome that awaits you, whenever, and however often you come,—"Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Cant. v. 1). Buy and eat, if you would grow in all that is pure and lovely and God-like, and if you would go on unto perfection.

CHAPTER VIII.

"YEA, COME, BUY WINE AND MILK WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE."

WATER and bread, beautiful and striking emblems of salvation, are followed by two more images, "wine" and "milk," which help to illustrate the variety and richness of spiritual blessings, and the joy which they impart to all who receive them.

The frequent and favourable notices of wine and milk in the Word of God show that they were regarded as of greater national value and importance in Bible lands than in our own; and, consequently, they would appear more significant emblems of salvation to the inhabitants of these countries than to us.

Wine and cheerfulness are associated together in the Scriptures. "Wine," we are told, "maketh glad the heart of man" (Ps. civ. 15). Milk is both meat and drink; it is highly nutritious as an article of diet at any stage of life, and forms the sole nourishment of man in his infancy, and that of the young of many animals.

What wine and milk are to the body, gospel blessings are to the soul. Like wine, their nature is to cheer. They and they only can impart true and lasting joy to

the heart of man. Like milk, they are both meat and drink. Thus believers are exhorted to be ever seeking nourishment to their souls. "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The gospel table is bountifully replenished with water and bread, and with wine and milk—yea, with soul-satisfying, soul-sustaining, soul-rejoicing, and soul-nourishing blessings. Here the heart of man may have all its desires satisfied, all its wants supplied, its ever-growing appetite for all that is pure and good and holy and Christlike gratified, and its boundless capacity for happiness filled by Him who will cause the heart of every one that opens to admit Him, to rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. And all to be obtained, without money and without price.

Salvation is free. This is a truth repeated again and again in the first verse of our chapter, with ever-increasing emphasis as it proceeds, and the climax is reached in its last clause. "Come to the waters," implies that we have nothing to pay, but the words that immediately follow are more explicit, "And he that hath no money." Then we are invited to buy and eat, which might suggest that we have mistaken the prophet's language, and that after all we have something to pay,—for how could we buy without money; but no, there is no mistake, for the closing words of the verse reiterate, in the most clear and emphatic manner, the absolute freeness of the blessings symbolised—"Buy wine and milk, without money and without price."

Buying, as noticed in the last chapter, figuratively denotes that exercise of the soul, whereby we so take or receive the blessings of salvation that they become ours,

as really as anything we have bought and paid for with money becomes our absolute property.

Although sinners cannot buy salvation with money, or with their own merits, or with their own righteousness, or with anything they are or can become, or with anything they have done or can do, all that was necessary to be done has been done, and all that was necessary to be paid has been paid. Christ, by His perfect obedience, has magnified the law, and, by His sufferings and death, paid the price of our redemption. Had it been possible for us to have obeyed the law perfectly, and to have suffered the punishment our sins deserved, then God's well-beloved Son had never left the realms of glory, and lived the life He lived, and died the death He died, on earth. This costly sacrifice would have been spared. Had we all the money in the world, it would not suffice to purchase the forgiveness of one of our many transgressions, nor would any amount of self-inflicted punishment, nor our utmost efforts to keep the law of God, nor the labour of a whole lifetime to glorify our Heavenly Father, atone for a single sin. Nothing but the blood of Christ can cover our guilt. And we are as unable to work out a righteousness for ourselves, as we are to atone for our sins. We are utterly unable to furnish a single thread to, or lend the slightest aid in weaving, the beauteous robe of righteousness, "which is unto and upon all them that believe." Christ has done all, and suffered all, that was necessary for our salvation. He, Himself, is *the* money with which it has been bought; and He, Himself, is *the* price that has been paid for it.

Since He has paid the price, He invites us to come and buy salvation from Him, without money and without

price—that is, to come just as we are; poor and needy, sensible that we are utterly destitute spiritually, and, for nothing, receive from Him all we need. We are dead, and are to come to Him for life; are blind, and are to come to Him for sight; are in darkness, and are to come to Him for light; are guilty, and are to come to Him for pardon; are naked, and are to come to Him for clothing, —for the linen pure and white; we are weak, and are to come to Him for strength; are thirsty, and are to come to Him for living waters; are hungry, and are to come to Him for the bread of life; are miserable, and are to come to Him for happiness; are wretched, and are to come to Him for comfort; are sorrowful, and are to come to Him for sympathy; are poor, and are to come to Him for incorruptible riches;—yea, we are to come with these and all our other spiritual wants, that they may be supplied out of His inexhaustible fulness. How thankful we should be that, however many and great these wants of ours may be, they are neither too many nor too great, and can never become too many or too great, to be supplied from this source; for God is able to supply all our need, according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus. We have a void in our hearts, which nothing earthly can fill, and we are invited by Jesus to come with it to Himself, that He may fill it with Himself. The language of every one whose heart has opened to admit Him is, "He is all my salvation, and all my desire."

In this world, men buy and sell, and get gain. Greater eagerness is shown in this traffic than in anything else under the sun. The aim of some, is, to buy in the cheapest, and sell in the dearest market. The aim of others,

is, to buy so cheap that they may be able to sell with a large profit. The aim, probably of most, is, to buy at such a price as to be able to sell, so as to realise a reasonable profit. The difference in each case between the price paid for the goods, and that for which they were sold, is the profit. When one buys, so as to be able to sell with a good profit, he buys at an advantage. In the text we are invited to buy and get gain, but we are not invited to buy, *and sell*, and get gain. When we comply with the invitation, we buy at an immense advantage, for, for nothing we buy all things; but although we buy at an immense advantage, we cannot sell with a profit. For what could we sell or part with pardon or peace, or righteousness, or a title to heaven, or the riches that are unsearchable, or the crown that never fadeth, or the joy that never faileth, or Christ Himself, the sum of all blessing! Is there any price you can name for these, by receiving which, you would be a gainer? Were you to receive all the riches and honours and pleasures of this world in exchange for them, you would be an infinite loser. You can buy with a profit, but you cannot sell with a profit. Our duty and interest alike are, to buy and sell not. "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Those who have truly come to Jesus have no desire to sell or part with the treasures they have received from Him. They cleave to Him who is the source of all blessing with a firmer grasp than that with which the miser cleaves to his gold, or the drowning man to the object he first lays hold on.

Neither the gold of the miser, nor the thing held by the drowning man, has any power to reciprocate the grasp by which it is held, but the hand of faith in laying hold

on Jesus is grasped or held by Him. Were we to lay hold on Jesus, and not He also on us, our faith might—yea, doubtless, would—fail; but He who holds us as we lay hold on Him, is an Almighty Friend, and can never fail. He will never suffer any one to pluck us out of His hands. It is this reciprocity of grasp, as well as the great love which believers cherish for their Lord, which inspires them with the conviction and assurance that they are united to Him in indissoluble bonds. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Salvation is free. This is one of the most glorious truths which the Bible proclaims. If we buy all the spiritual blessings we need without money and without price, is nothing required of us in return? No, nothing, by way of price or merit. The sole merit must ever be Christ's. Nothing can be added to the price He has paid for our redemption. But by way of gratitude we owe Him much, and give and do what we may, we will never cease to be His debtors.

Since Christ has obeyed all the precepts of the law, and suffered its penalty for us, has the law ceased to have

claims on our obedience? No. It has new and stronger claims upon us than ever it had before. Genuine believers strive to keep the commandments, not that they may receive forgiveness and be delivered from hell, but because they have been forgiven; not they may receive a title to heaven and eternal life, but because they have received this title; not that they may obtain merit or a price with which to purchase salvation, but because its price has been paid for them. "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." Christ says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments;" and His people love Him and keep His commandments, not that they may induce Him to love and redeem them, but because He first loved them and gave Himself for them. They give themselves to Him, because He first gave Himself for them. They obey, love, and serve Him, not for wages, not to repay a single fraction of what He paid for their salvation, not that they may deserve in the least any of the blessings He has purchased for them; but for the great love wherewith He loved them, when for their sakes He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again."

The following incident helps to illustrate the kind of love which burns for Christ in believers' hearts, and the nature of the new obedience and service His people render to Him. A poor slave was being conveyed in a ship from one part of the Southern States of America to another,

for the purpose of being sold. A white gentleman, who was a passenger on board, began to bargain with his master to buy him. The slave might have felt happy in the prospect of a change of masters, for benevolence seemed to beam in the white man's face. But no, he felt as if the chains of slavery were being riveted firmer than ever on him and his brethren. If one belonging to a nation of freemen, and so apparently good, could thus buy his fellow-men, what hope, thought the negro, was there for poor slaves. A feeling of repugnance to the gentleman rose in his bosom, and increased in intensity, as dollar after dollar was told out and rattled on the table ; but the tingle of the last dollar had not died away, till the joyful news greeted his ears and transported his heart, "Thou art free." And as he was realising the fact that no legal chains, as he expected, would bind him to his buyer, another chain was forging which bound him firmer than the other ever could to his liberator. He felt he was free, and yet not free, for he felt the silken cords of love binding him for ever to his benefactor. Falling down before him, kissing his deliverer's very footprints, twining his arms around his feet, and gazing up into his beaming face, he exclaimed, "O massa, massa! I am thy slave for ever and ever." The application is easy. Salvation is free to us, because Christ has paid all the money that was necessary as the price of our redemption, when He gave Himself for us. Let us ever be seeking to follow the example of the freed slave, by giving ourselves unreservedly to Him who hath redeemed us unto God with His own blood. Blood-bought sinner, let the motto emblazoned on your banner be—"To me to live is Christ."

CHAPTER IX.

"WHEREFORE."

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"—ISAIAH lv. 2.

TO "weigh"—the Hebrew word rendered "spend" in the text—has the same significance as to spend has now. It was the custom of the Hebrews and other ancient nations to "weigh" out money (silver or gold), and not to count it as we do.

"Wherefore," like the first word of our chapter, seems to be spoken in a loud voice,—and no wonder, for it is addressed to those who have turned a deaf ear, alike to the loud cry, "Ho," and to the still small voice, "Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Of those who slight such a cry as that, and such an invitation as this, man would likely say, It is enough, let them alone. It is otherwise, however, with God. His warnings and invitations are alike slighted by millions, but so unwilling is He that sinners should perish, and so anxious that they should turn unto Him and live, that He does not give them up until He has adopted and exhausted other modes of seeking to persuade them to accept of salvation. With those who have alike been indifferent to the thun-

der peal of "Ho," and to the gentle and entreating whisper "Come," He graciously condescends to reason, and to plead with them to reason with themselves. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"

It is true that man needs but little here, nor needs that little long; but he must have that little or perish. It is bread he needs. Bread stands for food in general, and in its widest sense for all that is needful for the support and welfare of these bodies of ours, which are so fearfully and wonderfully made. To spend our money, and the fruits of our laborious toils, on objects, however beautiful or delicious or valuable in themselves, while we neglect to buy bread, and leave our bodies to starve and sicken and die, would be the height of folly. Such folly, does not, perhaps, exist to any very great extent, for in general the body is pretty well cared for. Yet in spite of the almost universal cry, "What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" there are not a few who are, less or more, guilty of spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.

The intoxicating cup is not bread. It cannot nourish the bodily frame. It may gratify a false and unhealthy appetite, and keep its votaries when under its spell in a state of delirious enjoyment; but at last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder. It can never impart, even temporarily, the genuine feeling of satisfaction which is the result of eating and drinking what God in His providence has provided for satisfying our hunger and quenching our thirst. With respect, then, even to this

present life, those who prefer intoxicating drink to bread are guilty of the folly of spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. It is not the lovers of strong drink only who are guilty of the folly of spending money for that which is not bread.

We are acquainted with a merchant who has made, and is still making, money. He is what is called a "good templar," and has been the means of reclaiming several drunkards, so that he has not lived in vain. We noticed for some time that he was very unwell, and not likely to get better, but was growing worse and worse. One day, as he was taking a dose of medicine, we inquired how he was in health. "Oh, very badly," he replied; "and I feel as if I were never going to get better." "When do you dine?" we inquired. "Dine!" he answered, "I have not had a dinner for the last five or six months." "Why?" "Because my business cannot stand still during the day, and no one can take my place for half or even a quarter of an hour. Were I to let go the helm, for however short a time, my business would begin to drift away." "How, then, do you nourish your body?" "I take my breakfast early in the morning, and my tea at night; and in the interval between these two meals, from ten to fourteen hours, I am constantly engaged, and have no time for eating and drinking." We told him that, as long as he neglected to dine, he would never regain his health. "Well," was his reply, "I cannot help it." He was very fond of horses, and had lately paid a high price for one for his van. We drew him into conversation about the animal, in the course of

which we said, "Suppose your vanman were careless about your horse, and you discovered that he was frequently neglecting to give it its meals, what would you say to him?" "Say to him, why, I would dismiss him at once." "Then," we said, "you should dismiss yourself also, for you are surely of more value than your horse. It would be counted by you an unpardonable fault were your man occasionally to forget to give your horse its food, while you yourself have neglected for the last six months to dine." Good templar and professed Christian though he was, he was living in open disregard of these words of Christ: "Come and dine;" and was guilty of the folly of spending, if not his money, what was of even more importance, — spending himself for that which was not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not.

We are acquainted with another, in many respects an excellent man, who is likewise prospering in his business and making money. He is an office-bearer in a church, and magnifies his office, for he discharges its duties with great zeal and faithfulness. Unlike our other friend, he does not neglect to dine, but he lives in a room at the back of his shop, the atmosphere of which is vitiated by the effluvium that is cast off from the goods he deals in. Into this apartment the beams of the sun scarcely penetrate. In consequence of living in this place, his food does not nourish, nor his sleep refresh him to the extent they would were he to live in a dwelling apart from his shop, and one in which fresh air could circulate and the sun shine freely. He is now in very feeble health, and is almost despairing of ever getting better. He is

seemingly thoroughly alive to the interests of his soul, but apparently is not aware that it is as sinful to neglect the body as it is to neglect the soul. We have expostulated with him on this point, but in vain. This man, as far as his bodily welfare is concerned, is spending his money and himself for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not.

There are many others who in divers ways, even with respect to this present life, like our two friends, are spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. Were we to say to any one of them, My friend, we have good grounds to believe that you will commit suicide some day, the prompt reply would, no doubt, be, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Yes, you are. You are doing the very thing now; it may be slowly, yet surely and effectively.

Our subject leads us naturally to glide from the body to the soul, from the life that now is to that which is to come, from the meat that perisheth to that which endureth unto eternal life. It is of these our subject speaks to us. It is to this high platform it lifts us. The stake is great, for it is not the perishing body, but the immortal soul. The bread spoken of is not that which sustains life for the brief span of a few years at the most, but it is that bread which if a man eat he shall live for evermore. It is soul-bread, and consists of those gospel blessings so freely offered to us in the first verse of our chapter. As bread stands for all that is necessary to sustain our present life, so here figuratively it stands for all that our soul needs for its life, its health, and its present and eternal welfare.

Money itself is the bread with which some seek to feed their souls. None, perhaps, pursue an object so earnestly and toil so laboriously to attain it as they do. They never spend their money with the least pleasure, unless they are spending with the certainty of increasing their store of it. Yet though it increases, it does not satisfy. The fault, they imagine, is not in the money itself, but in the quantity. They have not enough, and so they must sweat and toil from morning till evening, rising up early and sitting up late, if so be their money may grow. Sometimes health, leisure, innocent amusements, friends, and all earthly good things are sacrificed in order that pounds, shillings, and pence may increase; but all in vain, for although they increase ever so much, even to the extent of tens of millions of pounds sterling, the soul refuses to be satisfied with them, and the unsatisfied appetite cries out more imperiously than ever, More, more. O ye worshippers of gold! wherefore do ye spend yourselves, if not your money, for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? No soul yet has ever found money to be bread, and it is in vain for you to try to feed your soul on it.

Sinful lusts and pleasures are the bread with which many seek to gratify their souls. If such persons are ever eager to make money, it is not, like those we have just been speaking about, for the sake of the gold itself, but that they may consume it upon their lusts. However sweet these pleasures are to the carnal appetite, they are not food but poison to the soul. At least, the gratification they yield is but of short duration, and while it lasts the seeds are being sown of a future harvest of

misery, to be reaped even in this world. "The way of transgressors is hard" is written not only in our Bibles, but in our newspapers, and almost everywhere. "Wherefore," O ye lovers of sinful lusts and pleasures! "do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Some seek happiness in innocent amusement and recreations, and what may be called lawful pleasures. In these there is nothing wrong in themselves. They may be even needful. But they are not the bread our souls need. If we value money chiefly for the sake of its enabling us to procure ease and comfort and amusement and recreation, and to travel from place to place, or in many other innocent ways to enjoy life, we spend our money in vain, as far as our souls are concerned, for these will utterly fail to satisfy their hunger. They and a thousand other things may not be evil, yet they are not the bread upon which our inner man can be sustained, and those who seek to substitute them for it are spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.

Ambition is not bread. Eager multitudes everywhere are vainly trying with it to cure that gnawing hunger that is tearing at their hearts, but in vain. It is not wrong in itself to strive to excel in that which is lawful. Many have become rich, many have attained fame and glory and other earthly distinctions, without neglecting to partake of the bread of life, and in consequence of their success have been enabled to glorify God and benefit their fellow-men. But if the pursuit of one or other of these becomes the chief end of any man, then that one spends his money for that which is not bread, and his labour for

that which satisfieth not. Those who have been the world's greatest favourites have illustrated i their lives and deaths, and some of them with their own lips, that the soul needed for bread some better and more enduring portion than any of those earthly things, however precious and desirable and bright and dazzling in themselves they might be, and at however much toil and perseverance they had been gained. Our Alexanders the Great, our Napoleons, our Nelsons, and others, conspicuous figures in the world's history, that come crowding into our memories, attempted to assuage the pangs of the soul's hunger on the objects of their ambition, but all in vain. These, and suchlike conspicuous characters, eclipsed all who have ever aspired for fame or honour or glory or other earthly distinctions, but utterly failed in finding true happiness. How futile, then, are the attempts of the millions who are now following their example, in their eager pursuit of distinction, without the remotest chance of ever even nearly equalling that of theirs.

Charles C. F. Greville, Clerk of the Council to King George IV. and King William IV., saw much of the world and high life. Few have ever been more favoured in these respects than he was. In his memoirs you will find many pictures drawn from life, illustrating the folly of spending money for that which is not bread. Turn to vol. i., page 44, and you will see one of these pictures taken from life. It is not, however, that of one of the many persons who were constantly presenting themselves for their portraits, for here he draws a picture of himself. "I have experienced," he says, "a great many proofs of the vanity of human wishes. In the course of three weeks

I have attained to the three things which I have most desired in the world, for years past, and upon the whole I do not feel that my happiness is at all increased. Perhaps if it were not for one cause it might be, but until that ceases to exist, it is in vain that I acquire every other advantage, or possess the means of amusement." The experience of Mr. Greville is that not of himself only, but of all who have sought their chief good in earthly things; and it will be yours too, if you follow their example. Even if the object of your search is gained, there will always be "one cause" or another that will prevent it from yielding the entire satisfaction you expected. All fountains, save the fountain of living waters, are broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Your great ambition may be to become a great merchant, or a great lawyer, or a great statesman, or a great minister of the Gospel, or a great something else, but if one or other of these be the supreme object of your life, and esteemed by you of more importance than your soul's spiritual welfare, then you are spending money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not. Such greatness is not bread. The soul refuses to be satisfied with it. Alas! how many great merchants and great lawyers and great statesmen and great preachers have found, in pursuing greatness in order to satisfy their soul-hunger for happiness, that they have been spending their money on that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.

Some, while very busy in learning the business or profession by which they expect to gain their livelihood, if not distinction, excuse the neglect of their soul's welfare by covenanting with themselves, that when they have finished

their learning, and have started in business on their own account, they will then take time to attend to their spiritual welfare. Business is commenced, at length, but now they are fired with the ambition of excelling their neighbours, and so the business of religion is again postponed. They succeed in surpassing their neighbours, and now they look forward to getting married, and resolve to turn a new leaf when that happy event takes place. But alas! when matrimony is entered on, the soul's great interests are again deferred. Children are born, grow up, and the married are fired by new and more powerful motives than ever, for these children have to be reared and educated and settled in life. Business must be pushed more and more, and so it is more difficult than ever for such men to get time, really and seriously, to prepare for another world. Still, they resolve to find time by-and-by, only not yet. Their sons have to be set up in business, and their daughters have to be comfortably settled, and when all this is accomplished, they intend to retire from business, and devote the few remaining years of their lives to caring for their souls, and laying up treasure in heaven. The period of retirement is at length entered on, but alas! it brings along with it new cares and trials and labours, and the time for the soul to be cared for in earnest is again put off. At length, sickness and disease and old age, with its many infirmities, overtake these deluded persons. At last, on a dying bed they awaken to an awful sense of the folly of their past life, and so pass away into eternity, bitterly lamenting that the money of a lifetime has been spent on that which is not bread, and the labour of a lifetime on that which satisfieth not. All the

while they have been drinking out of broken cisterns, which can hold no water. How many thousands and tens of thousands thus live and thus die!

Are you so living? If so, then, that you may not awake till on a dying bed, or until you are passing into, or have passed into, another world, to a sense of so great folly, and so have to lament that the money of a lifetime has been spent on that which is not bread, and the labour of a lifetime on that which satisfieth not, is the reason why "Wherefore?" is now sounding in your ears. Cease from spending your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not. Everything under the sun has been tried to satisfy the soul's hunger, and has failed. It is in vain for you to hope to succeed, when all who have ever tried have failed. In answer to the loud cry, "Wherefore?" perhaps you say, "I am convinced of the utter folly of finding that which will satisfy my soul's desires, in earthly things, and I intend, whenever I have made so much money, have gained such or such a position in society, have obtained this or that situation, or something else, that I will be content with my earthly portion, and not aspire to anything greater, but will then seek and find a portion for my soul." If you so treat this warning call, "Wherefore?" the likelihood is, that you will die and pass into eternity, like the persons whose end we have described, lamenting that the money of a lifetime has been spent on that which is not bread, and the labour of a lifetime on that which satisfieth not. If you would avoid their fate, let this word, "Wherefore?" receive from you the only safe and wise answer it can receive. It admonishes you

to seek, first, and now, not the good things of this life, and then the kingdom of God, but to seek now, and at once, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, which, if you do, all needful things for this life shall be added. Cease now, then, and at once, to misspend your money and your labour on that which is not bread and cannot satisfy.

Perhaps you are a member of a Christian Church, and think you are well acquainted with the way of salvation, and that it will not be difficult for you at some future time to seek and find Christ, as you know the way. Only it is not quite convenient yet. There is some little sin you cannot give up, some idol you cannot break, some of the things of this world that cleave to you and you to them; and for the sake of this sin, and this idol, and these earthly things, you go on spending your money, your time, your labour, and yourself, although you are convinced that your soul needs something better to make it truly happy, now and for ever. Some time, however, before death you intend to turn from these broken cisterns to Christ, the fountain of living waters. The longer you wait, these hindering things will cleave to you the closer, and you to them. This word, "Wherefore?" calls upon you to give up your folly. Let go your hold of all these, and no longer spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not. Believe now in Christ. Come to Him, the fountain of living waters. Drink and live.

Some have become convinced of the utter folly of finding happiness in the perishing things of time, without finding that which can satisfy their souls. Many when

convinced of sin and the utter insufficiency of the world's good things to impart true peace to the soul, seek, but in vain, to obtain such peace by working out a righteousness of their own. How great is this folly, when the good the soul needs is offered to us without money and without price! This word "Wherefore?" appeals to your judgment. It asks you to consider the matter for yourselves. If you are spending your money for that which is not bread, what is the reason you are acting so foolishly? That which your soul needs to impart to it true and lasting happiness is offered to you for nothing. Wherefore, since happiness can be obtained by you gratuitously, are you at so great pains in seeking to find it where it has never yet, and never will, be found?

Oh may this word "Wherefore?" never cease to ring in your ears until you yield to its counsel by abandoning all your vain efforts to find rest to your souls in the things of time and sense. Turn from such broken cisterns to Jesus, the fountain of living waters. Come unto Him and drink, and the thirst of your souls shall be truly satisfied. He is the bread of life. Come to Him and eat, and you shall hunger no more. Oh for a trumpet tongue with which to sound this warning word "Wherefore?" into the ears of all those who persist in spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. To all who give due heed to this warning word "Wherefore?" it will be a joyful sound. May it be such to you.

CHAPTER X.

"EAT THAT WHICH IS GOOD."

"Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good."—ISAIAH lv. 2.

"HO" gives one loud knock on ear-gate. Many, alas, give no heed to it; but so unwilling is God that sinners should be lost, that in amazing condescension to these heedless ones He knocks again, and this time not once, but twice; and these knocks come one after another in rapid succession, denoting the earnestness with which the Lord seeks to save the perishing,—Hearken, hearken, unto me. In the text, we read, "Hearken diligently unto me;" but in the Hebrew the word "Hear" is repeated, and such repetition is more emphatic than the translation; though, no doubt, "Hearken, hearken," implies to hear diligently and attentively.

Such hearing as is here required implies more than the mere literal act of hearing. It is hearing, with the intention of obeying. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." It is because men will not hear the Lord, but follow their own imaginations, or the evil counsels of others, that they toil, and labour, and spend their money and themselves on that which is not bread, which not

only fails to satisfy, but ever gives rise to bitter disappointment, misery, and unrest.

"That which is good" comprises those blessings which in the previous verse are represented under the striking and beautiful emblems of water, bread, wine, and milk; and eating includes all that in that verse is implied in coming, and buying, and eating. These blessings are all summed up in Christ. We eat that which is good, when we believe on Him, and choose Him as our soul's portion. He is the only Water that can quench the thirst of our souls, the only Bread that can satisfy their hunger, and impart to them that nourishment by which we are enabled to grow up into the full stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

Religion has both a negative and a positive side. These two often lie close together in the Scriptures. They appear in such passages as these, "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord;" and here, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good." The negative side on which we are here exhorted is, to cease to spend our money for that which is not bread, and our labour on that which satisfieth not; the positive side is, hearkening unto the Lord, and eating that which is good. Both of these sides must be attended to, or the soul cannot be saved. Both would be observed if the voice of God were listened to. But multitudes, when convinced of the folly of the course they have been following, are led by their own imaginations, or the evil

counsel of others; the result of which is, that instead of eating that which is good, they only begin some new course of folly, and so continue spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. The reclaimed drunkard rightly resolves not to spend another penny on intoxicating drink, but if he becomes as anxious to hoard it as he had previously been to waste it, and denies himself and his family needful things, he is still, though in a different way, spending his money for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not. Or if the lover of unlawful pleasures, aroused through some providential circumstances to a sense of the injury he is doing to body and soul, and the certain and irretrievable ruin he is bringing on both, summons courage sufficient to turn from that way whose steps lead down to hell, but, instead of hearkening to the Lord, by eating that which is good, gives himself up greedily to other, though lawful, pleasures, or even to what are deemed noble pursuits, he will find that each and all of these will utterly fail to yield peace and happiness to his soul. These are not bread, and cannot satisfy. Or, if a man, whose ruling passion has been to make and amass money, becomes convinced of his folly, and having strength to turn from it, seeks to make amends for his former greed of filthy lucre by wisely spending what is needful for the due temporal welfare of himself and those dependent on him, and the rest on various religious and philanthropic objects; yet all this, however praiseworthy, will not procure for him the bread his soul needs; and so he continues still, as far as his spiritual interests are concerned, to spend his money for that

which is not bread, and which satisfieth not; and he will continue to do so as long as he turns a deaf ear to these words of Him who speaks from heaven, "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good." The vain, the proud, the ambitious, and all others who are in pursuit of happiness, will never find peace and rest to their souls till they listen to God's voice. Pleasures, amusements, money, estates, titles, honours, fame, glory, crowns, and kingdoms, and all other earthly things, however bright, and beautiful, and glorious, and desirable they may appear to many, are not bread, are not that which is good. The soul has never been satisfied with any or all of these. They are all broken cisterns which can hold no water. The perishing soul must turn not from one broken cistern to another broken cistern, but to Christ, who is the only fountain of living waters, of which, if a man drink, he shall thirst no more, and who is the only bread of which, if a man eat, he shall never hunger. Whosoever eateth of this bread, eateth "that which is good. "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good."

Many, when convinced of the folly of persevering any longer in seeking to find a satisfying portion for their souls in earthly things, when convinced that something better, more spiritual, and more Godlike, and more enduring, is needed to appease the thirst and hunger of their hearts,—instead of hearkening to the voice of God, vainly, and often with unutterable agony, set themselves to work out a righteousness of their own. No doubt, if they could attain to a perfect righteousness, their troubled consciences might be quieted, and their weary

hearts find rest, but all man's efforts in this direction have ever been, and ever will be, a total failure. It is only a perfect and complete righteousness that can satisfy the soul's need; and as the very best righteousness that any man, of himself, has ever attained to has been imperfect, such a righteousness is not bread, is not the good the soul needs; the soul refuses to be satisfied and nourished by it. Ye who are thus seeking peace and rest to your troubled hearts, listen to God's voice when He says, "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good." That is, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, accept Him as the portion of your soul, and then you will have perfect righteousness, for He Himself will be the Lord your righteousness; in Him you will have every other blessing that is needful for your soul's true happiness, now and for ever. *He* is "that which *is good*," the supreme good; and all else, however fair and beautiful, and desirable—till He is believed on and appropriated as the soul's portion—is evil, only evil, and that continually. He is not only the good, but the fountain of all good, that good through which flows all the good our souls need; the only good that can abide with us at all times and in all seasons,—for it is that good part that shall not be taken away. He is that good which alone is adequate to satisfy, and nourish, and sustain our souls through all life's weary pilgrimage, to cheer them in the hour of death, and to bless and gladden them for ever. "Hearken, hearken unto me, and eat ye that which is good."

CHAPTER XI.

"DELIGHT YOUR SOUL IN FATNESS."

"And let your soul delight itself in fatness."—ISAIAH lv. 2.

"DELIGHT" is a charming word, and is associated in our minds with our happiest hours, and with those temporal things from which we have derived the greatest pleasure; it is that which gives hope its power to gild the future of our life here with visions of earthly felicity. If we have eaten our food with gladness, we still hope to be gratified by partaking of many things which will be delicious to our taste. If we have fondly gazed on lovely scenes, we still hope to gaze with rapture on many more. If our ear has been regaled with sweet sounds, we still hope to be charmed with the converse of those we love and esteem, as well as with the stirring strains of music. If our minds have greedily drunk in knowledge, we still look forward to the exquisite pleasure of drinking on and on, and thereby knowing more and more of what may be known. In these and many other ways we may not be altogether strangers to enjoyment, and may often mentally or audibly have exclaimed, as we experienced great pleasure in this or that, How delightful!

Delight is no doubt a thing of time and sense, and seems to many alien to that religion which calls upon us

to take up our cross and to deny ourselves, and even to forsake our dearest friends and the things we most highly prize, in order to follow Him who was the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And yet, while all this is true, delight is not alien to religion, but rather inseparably bound up with it, nay, is its very spirit,—"Let your soul delight itself in fatness;" that is, not merely be satisfied, but highly pleased, and gratified to the full, with the bounteous provision of spiritual good things God has made for our souls' welfare.

Although our senses and our minds are so constituted as to be delighted with things seen and temporal, yet there is constant danger of some of these things instead of remaining our servants becoming our masters, and when this occurs the soul is led captive by them. How many, from being cheered and delighted with the moderate use of wine or other stimulant, have acquired such a liking for it as to become its slaves, and as such have become beacons to warn others of the danger to which delight in wine exposes. So great is the danger that some have been led to abstain altogether, and to advise their neighbours to follow their example. Some people, not content with eating suitable food, and a sufficient quantity, with relish and delight, have become gluttons. They eat to excess; and not only is their cry, "What shall we eat?" but, "How shall we stimulate our appetite so that we may eat more than is necessary to satisfy our natural hunger?" Very disgusting is it to observe the behaviour of those whose god is their belly. The eye and the ear are so constructed as to afford delight, yet they have been transformed by many from servants into masters; and then, no

longer ministering to their true welfare, have helped to ruin their souls. The sights, pure or impure, which they have accustomed their eyes supremely to delight in, have hid the Saviour from their view; and the sounds they have trained their ears chiefly to be gratified with, have drowned the voice of Him who has been speaking in His Word and in His providence.

There are what are called worshippers of nature. Nature is no doubt fitted to delight us and instruct; but when it so absorbs any one as to cause him to neglect the Word of God and the glad tidings of salvation which it contains, then the delight that he experiences in nature becomes a snare. We knew a man of great parts and learning. No one we ever heard of was so fascinated with nature; he seemed in danger, for her sake, of neglecting the one thing needful. He worshipped her morning, noon, and evening. From the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall, the vegetable kingdom had charms for him. The tiniest flower or weed that came in his way was examined and fondled with delight, even to the neglect of what was his duty and interest at the time. Nor had he less delight in living creatures. He gazed with delight on their motions. Their slightest movements even of their ears and tails highly pleased him. He was in the custom of standing and gazing on these creatures and their varied motions when he ought himself to have been otherwise engaged. Evidently nature had become his master. His devotion to her, poor fellow! deprived him at last of his reason.

The acquisition of knowledge, however praiseworthy and desirable, has been the ruin of many. The delight which some have experienced in acquiring knowledge has

led them captive till they became its abject slaves. In this pursuit some have brought on themselves sickness, feebleness, disease, and sometimes even premature death; and not a few, alas, for the knowledge they panted after, have neglected the only knowledge that maketh wise unto salvation. Admitting that God has endowed us with senses and faculties so constituted as to fit them to give us delight in the many things He has created for their gratification, yet there is great reason for caution with regard to our delighting ourselves in earthly things; the danger is so great of some of them becoming our masters, and we their dupes and slaves. "Let your moderation be known unto all men," applies to each and all of them. If we neglect this precept, then, however great our delight may be in tasting, or seeing, or hearing, or conversing, or acquiring knowledge, it will sooner or later give place to dismay and anguish, remorse and bitter disappointment.

No such caution is given with respect to the things the soul is invited to delight in. These are altogether excluded from the seen and temporal things in the enjoyment of which we are exhorted to be moderate. We are at liberty to delight ourselves in the feast of good things furnished by God for the soul's delight, without stint or fear of excess. In sitting at this festive board there is no danger of eating or drinking to excess. "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." "Let your soul delight itself in fatness,"—is not this a repetition of what is evidently implied in the first verse of the chapter? Can a thirsty, hungry, weary, fainting soul become a partaker of the blessings represented by water, bread, wine, milk, without being delighted? We believe not. The thirsty

cannot but be delighted with water, the hungry with bread, the weary with rest, and the faint with what will cheer and refresh them. Coming, buying, eating, and delighting are all spoken of as if they were different exercises of the soul; any of them includes what is intended by all the others. But as these are acts or exercises that are distinct from one another with respect to temporal things, they are spoken of here as if they were different, so as the more clearly and vividly to depict to us various aspects of true faith. One may come to the market and yet not buy; another may come and buy, and yet not eat; another may come and buy and eat, and yet not be delighted with eating; and another still may come and buy and eat, and be delighted as he eats. So sinners are invited to come to Christ, and coming to buy from Him those rich provisions He has at His command for the soul's needs; and buying, to eat; and eating, to enjoy the feast of good things,—"Let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Fat is figuratively used to denote a fertile land (Neh. ix. 25; Num. xiii. 20; Ezek. xxxiv. 14), and also the rich and abundant temporal blessings it yields (Gen. xlv. 18; xxvii. 28). In our text, fatness is descriptive of the richness, and excellence, and plentifulness of those spiritual blessings upon which the life and happiness of our souls depend; for it is the soul of which our text speaks,—"Let your soul delight itself in fatness." "Fatness" is another figure added to water, bread, wine, and milk, to describe the surpassing excellence and overflowing abundance of spiritual blessings. We are invited to partake of these blessings, which are like life to the perishing,

like cold water to the thirsty, like bread to the hungry, like wine to the fainting, or a fat land to those who have long endured the privations and hardships of a wilderness life.

We are not only invited to come for the blessings of salvation, to take possession of them as really as we do of things we have bought and paid for, and to partake of them as really as we partake of the food we eat, but we are also invited and encouraged, nay commanded, to delight ourselves with these blessings as we partake of them,—"Let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Some Christians do not seem very greatly to delight themselves. They are more noted for mourning over their own and others' sins and shortcomings, grieving over the vanity, and folly, and wickedness that abound in the world. They give themselves up to prayer, and fasting, and self-examination, and to cross-bearing, but seldom or never are they seen to smile or laugh, for they seem to think it would be wrong to indulge their souls in such exercises as would irradiate their faces with sunshine, and cause glad-some words to drop from their lips. They surely forget or ignore this command of their Lord, "Let your soul delight itself in fatness." Well may those of us who have come to Jesus delight our souls in fatness. We are guilty sinners, but have been pardoned. We are daily trans-gressors, but we receive daily forgiveness. How can we but delight in God's forgiving love? Our sins expose us to the wrath and curse of God, but "there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." What a solid ground for delight in this blessed truth! We need perfect righteousness before we can be entitled to enter

the realms of bliss. It is utterly beyond our power, or the power of any fellow-mortal, to work out for us such a justifying righteousness. But Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believeth. How can we appropriate and gaze on this spotless robe of righteousness, and our souls not delight in it? We are vile, and as such, even were we admitted into the realms of light and glory, would be unhappy there; but on believing in Jesus we were born again, and although sin still dwelleth within us, it does not reign, and as grace advances it will continue to decline, for "He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ." It is true that sin, in a greater or lesser degree, will accompany us through life, and even to the gates of paradise, but it will not enter along with us. Can we be the subjects of a measure of purity now through the grace of God, and thus have within us the pledge of perfect holiness hereafter, and not delight ourselves in the blessed sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit by which we are enabled to go on unto perfection? Light is pleasant to the eye, but not less pleasant is Christ, the Light of the world, to the souls of His children. He enlightens them by the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to take of the things which are Christ's and show them unto us; and He teaches and enlightens by the Holy Scriptures. Blessed Light! shall we possess it and not delight in it! The Light, the only Light that can lead and guide us in the way everlasting! How can we but delight ourselves in His Holy Word, which makes Himself known to us; which tells us of His perfections, His laws, His mercy to fallen men, and which makes known to us all that He requires of us! Like David, let

us so delight in it as to be able to say, "Oh, how love I thy law; it is my meditation all the day. The law of the Lord is perfect. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

The Scriptures are precious and to be delighted in, not only for light but also for nourishment. The child of God cannot but be delighted, as with desire he drinks the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The sanctuary is the place where God has promised, in a special way, to meet and bless His people, and where they have been specially delighted with the sweet mercies of the Lord. If we worship Him there in spirit and in truth, we shall be delighted too, and find in our happy experience that the mercies of the Lord are satisfying in the highest degree; we shall be able from experience to sing with the psalmist, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness." All who love to worship God in the beauty of holiness shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house. The spiritual blessings and privileges which we have mentioned, as well as all others which belong to the children of God, are infinitely precious, and cannot fail, when appropriated by faith, to give delight. All the blessings are summed up in Christ, through whom they all flow. "Let your soul delight in him." Can you say from the heart without experiencing great delight, "My beloved is mine, and I am his"? When you find that all else beside Him is utterly unable to quench the thirst of your spirit, can

you but be delighted with Him, as you experience that He can fully satisfy the craving of your immortal soul? The blessings of salvation, which are all yea and amen in Christ, are the fat things on which you are invited to feast. Do not fear that there is any danger in delighting overmuch in the good things of the kingdom. The invitation, "Let your soul delight itself in fatness," is without limitation or reservation.

It is true that Christians have often to bear many trials and endure great sufferings; but these need not destroy their joy, they ought rather to brighten their hope, as it is through great tribulation they are to enter the kingdom. Even the bitterest persecution they may meet with in this world, instead of incapacitating them from delighting their souls in God's Word, and promises, and mercies, should increase their relish for and pleasure in them,—"Blessed are ye," says Jesus, "when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Whatever be the number and whatever be the nature of the evils that afflict God's children, they cannot dry up the spring of pure joy that gladdens their souls. Our hearts and our flesh may faint and fail, but the Lord is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever. Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. Millions of happy souls have eaten and drunk at this Gospel feast and been refreshed,—have delighted their souls with fatness,—and millions more, yea, all to whom the glad tidings of salvation come, are invited to delight themselves in eating and drinking these good things.

The fountain of blessing has never, and never will, run dry; it is like a sea without a shore, or an ocean without a bottom, unbounded, unlimited, inexhaustible. Come ye who have never yet come, but are still vainly trying to find true and lasting delight in the perishing things of time and sense,—come ye; oh, taste and see that God is good, and then you too will delight your soul in fatness.

How sad is the case of those who continue to refuse to comply with this blessed invitation. They no doubt find delight, though not truly satisfying and lasting, in some of the things which this world can supply. But let these things be what they may, sooner or later they will fail to delight those who seek their chief good in them. Even should these good things not take to themselves wings and flee away, in how many instances, after delighting for a season, do they begin to lose their power to please! In other instances in which they have long retained their power to impart pleasure, there come at last times of sickness, or disease, or pain, or agony, or old age with its feebleness and many infirmities, when they lose their power to delight any longer. Or, even should there be some instances in which even to old age they continue to delight, yet to all whose only portion is derived from these broken cisterns which can hold no water, there comes a time at last when they must part with all the things that delighted them. What will money, or pleasure, or honours, or titles, or any or everything that this great globe contains, do for them in the hour of their mortal agony? They can carry none of the things they delighted in away with them. They brought nothing

into the world with them, and they can carry nothing out; naked they entered the world, and naked they will depart from it.

Did we say they depart naked, and carry nothing away with them? We draw back the words, for their souls, as they leave this and enter the eternal world, are laden with sin and guilt,—guilt, which is the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.

How different it is with the righteous! Their delight in the good things which are their portion increases as they grow in years, for it is the law of their spiritual life to go from strength to strength. "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing." Sickness, and disease, and pain, and tribulation, and persecution, and even all the ills of this life, cannot dry up the source of their spiritual joy, nor drown their heavenly Father's voice, which is ever saying unto them, "Let your soul delight itself in fatness." The unrighteous, when they approach death, approach the stage when they depart from all they delighted in here; but the righteous, as they approach death, approach the time when they will part, not from the things they chiefly delighted in, but only from those that caused them grief and pain. Sin and sorrow will follow them to their dying bed, yea, to the very gates of paradise; but, blessed be God, sin and sorrow cannot enter along with them into the mansions of the blest. As they enter these gates they bid adieu to all their spiritual enemies and all the ills of this life. Nothing of evil will ever again mingle with their cup of

bliss. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There for evermore they shall delight their souls in fatness. "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

CHAPTER XII.

"INCLINE YOUR EAR."

"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live."—ISAIAH lv. 3.

THESE words form a golden chain of infinite value; a chain that may be said to be short, for it has only three links, and yet long, for it has no end. Its links are—hear, come, and live. Coming hangs on hearing, and living on coming. How wonderful it seems that the most precious of all precious things—soul life—should hang on the apparently slender links of hearing and coming. This, however, is the doctrine taught us, not only in the text, but throughout the whole Scriptures, and nowhere more frequently and impressively than in the first three verses of this fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah.

The first link of the chain is "Hear." Incline your ear. We do not incline the ear unless we hear consciously. An individual may sit for hours in a room where a clock is ticking, and in consequence of his mind being occupied in meditating or reading, be insensible of the sound, although it is sufficiently distinct and loud to be easily heard. Some who live close beside town or church bells are at times unconscious of hearing them ring. This arises

no doubt, in part from their having been long accustomed to the sound, and partly from their minds being more than ordinarily occupied with some subject in which they are deeply interested.

Many, in like manner, are utterly unconscious when the Lord is speaking to them. Were you to ask them sometimes, immediately after the Word of God has been read, "What chapter has been read?" they will tell you they don't know; or, if you inquire, "What has the chapter been about?" they cannot tell you. They are unconscious of the words which have been sounding in their ears. The sound they may have heard, but not the words. Their minds are an utter blank concerning all that God has been saying to them; and unless they had seen the Bible in the hands of the reader, or open before the preacher, they would have been totally ignorant of God's Word having been read. Their minds have been so fully occupied with other than spiritual things that no room has been left for even one word of God to enter. It may be a matter of no consequence whatever in the case of thousands or millions of people whether they hear the ticking of a clock or the ringing of bells, but it is of immense importance to all who are privileged to read, or have God's Word read to them, that they hear what the Lord says to them; for unless they incline their ears to hear His voice, they cannot be saved.

We do not incline the ear unless we hear attentively as well as consciously. We may hear with the bodily ear, without listening earnestly and attentively; we may remember more or less of what has been spoken of God's Word, but such hearing may be only with the outer ear. The voice of God, through our inattention, has not even

pierced the inner ear of our mind or understanding, and so we are practically no more benefited by the Word than those who are utterly unconscious that God is speaking. Unless we open the inner ear of the mind to God's voice, as well as the outer ear of our body, we do not obey His command, "Hear;" we do not incline our ear to hear what He says to us.

We do not incline the ear unless we hear with docility, as well as with consciousness and attention. One may listen very attentively to a speaker, and strive to understand what he says, not with a view to agree with, but to disagree from, him, and to overturn his arguments. There are individuals who read and hear the Word of God in this spirit. They read it carefully, diligently, earnestly, and with a sincere desire to understand at least its literal meaning; but all this is not in order to agree with it, to be taught by it, and to follow its counsel, but in order to differ from it, and to find fault with it, and to discover reasons for not obeying it. Such hearing is not what God requires when He says to us, "Hear." If we would obey Him, we must listen with consciousness and with earnest attention, and also with docility and reverence. If we so listen, we will be inclining our ear to God's Word; and, as we incline it, be looking up to Him, and exclaiming as we look, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!"

We do not incline the ear unless we strive to be ever in a hearing attitude—that is, ready at any moment to hear what God the Lord may choose to say unto us. There are some people who seem to hear now and again as if it were by fits and starts. They are seemingly attentive to God's voice in seasons of bereavement, or severe sickness, or great

pain, or distress, or danger; and we expect soon to see evidence that they have indeed heard, and are living as those who have inclined the ear; but, alas! we are doomed to disappointment, for they soon become as indifferent as ever they were to the voice of Him who had been speaking so loudly in His providence as well as in His Word. All the time they had only been seemingly hearing. Inclining the ear implies, not fitful hearing, but a habit of listening with earnestness and docility. Those who, by the grace of God, have acquired this habit, are ever in a hearing attitude. Their ears, both of body and mind, are ever bending or inclining to hear what God the Lord will say, and with the resolution to obey His voice.

We may learn a lesson concerning the inclining of the ear from many a dumb animal. The faithful dog's ears are ever inclining to hear the voice of his master. Even when the dog is sleeping, his ears seem as if they were waiting to hear. At the voice of his master he instantly springs to him, or flies away on the message he is commanded to carry. So quick is he to interpret his master's wishes that a mere glance of the eye, a nod of the head, or the motion of a finger is sufficient to cause the dog to listen with the inner ear of his spirit, and to understand and obey. This is inclining the ear. Let us cultivate such hearing. Let us listen with consciousness, with earnest attention, with docility, with reverence, and with constancy to the Word of God, with strong and lively desire to obey it; and so will we incline the ear in obedience to our Lord's command.

"Incline your ear" is a very winsome invitation. "Ho" gives a loud knock at the door of our hearts; and

no wonder, for it seeks to arouse us to a sense of our perishing condition. "Wherefore?" knocks less loudly, yet seems to reason while it knocks, and to induce us to reason with ourselves on the folly of seeking true and lasting happiness anywhere but where God has directed us to seek it. "Hearken, hearken!" though knocking less loudly than "Ho," and not so directly appealing to our reasoning faculties, yet seems, by the repetition, to knock with exceeding urgency, as if calling upon us to give instant heed to the Word of the Lord. "Incline your ear," though less loud than "Ho," and seemingly not so directly reaching our reasoning faculties, and apparently not so peremptorily pressing as "Hearken, hearken!" gives a quiet yet most beseeching knock, a gentle tap, as if by very gentleness it would woo us to open our ears, and our minds, and our hearts to the Word of the Lord.

How often God in mercy speaks to sinners in the first three verses of our chapter! He does not cut down, as He well might, the careless and indifferent hearer when He speaks to him the first time, but speaks again, and again, and again, and each time in fresh words and in different tones, as if thereby He might induce the sinner to hear and live. This shows how unwilling God is that any should perish, and how anxious He is that the perishing should come unto Him and be saved.

We cannot be saved without "hearing," and this is the reason why so much is said about it in the Word of God. We cannot begin to live anew, and we cannot, after being born again, continue to live without hearing. But can we hear without Divine aid? Our reply is, that none have ever yet been born again, or, after being born again, con-

tinued spiritually alive, apart from the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. Without His aid we will never hear what God says. Yet it is our duty at once to incline our ear to God's voice. Not only with respect to the spiritual life, but the temporal life also, it is in God we live, and move, and have our being. Though our temporal life every moment depends on God, yet we are continually doing things on which our life obviously depends, and never think of not doing them, although it is true we could not do them without God's help. But if it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to hear, is it not the Holy Spirit and not ourselves that is doing the hearing? No. If we are deaf, and place an ear-trumpet to our ears, that will help us to hear; nevertheless it will be we ourselves and not the trumpet that hears. Or if we betake ourselves to our doctor, and he succeeds in curing our deafness, it is we and not the doctor that will henceforth hear for us. Our Heavenly Father, who calls upon us to hear, is ever ready and willing to help all who feel themselves spiritually dull, to hear, if they ask Him. Oh! may we all turn His command into a prayer, and then we will assuredly be made able to comply with it. "O Lord, incline mine ear to hear thy word."

That God has given us ears to hear Him is a precious truth, and another truth not less precious is that He Himself hath ears that are ever open to hear us. These are truths the preciousness of which it is impossible for us fully to realise, or to be sufficiently grateful for. Suppose that from the present time our ears and those of the whole human family were effectually shut, as far as God's voice or Word is concerned, and that His ears were also closed

for ever to the cry of the children of men. For us, God's voice would be hushed for ever. The Bible would be a sealed book which no man could open, or if he were able to open it, he would listen in vain when he tried to hear God speaking from it. Church bells would ring no more on us to come up to the house of God, or if they did, it would only be to mock us; for it would be impossible for us, even if we entered the sanctuary, to hear the Lord speaking. Listen where we might, we should fail to hear even one word again from the Lord. Nor should we be only deaf to God's voice, but He would be deaf to our cries. In no place in the wide world should we be able to find a Bethel. Every family altar should be cast down and lying in ruins, never to be reared again. The tens of thousands of churches in this and other lands would no longer be called houses of prayer for all people. As regards seeking and finding God, the doors of all these sanctuaries should be shut, to be opened no more for ever. Where would we go with our sins and our guilt, with our sorrows and trials, with our doubts and darkness, with the hunger and unquenchable thirst of our souls? Where, oh where? God has no ear to hear us. We have no ear to hear Him. That our ears should be shut so that we could never open them again to hear God's voice, and His ears shut so that not one cry from us could ever be heard by Him, are calamities too great for us to realise. Not only true Christians, but nominal ones as well, should be paralysed with the terror of such an awful visitation of judgment. Spiritually, every one we met should not only be deaf but dumb. Our countenances should be changed, although we were not yet sent away into the unseen

world, and life would become a living death. Let us thank God that the picture the outlines of which we have been drawing is only a supposition. But may it help us to realise in some degree the greatness of our present privileges in having ears that can hear God's words, and a Father in heaven whose ears are ever open to hear us when we call upon Him. May we prize more than we have ever done the voice of the Lord, and cry out more earnestly than ever, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." May we be more than ever on our guard against reading or hearing God's Word carelessly and indifferently. At every opening of the Bible, and at every reading of the sacred page, may the prayer be ever ascending from our heart, "Lord, incline thou mine ear to hear thy Word." May our resolution, in dependence on His grace, be, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." May we also be desirous that He will hear us. May the language of our souls be, "I will sing praise to my God while I have my being;" and "I will call upon him as long as I live."

CHAPTER XIII.

"COME UNTO ME."

WE have already looked at the first link of the chain formed by the words "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." We now proceed to examine the second link, which is, "Come unto me." In one sense this may be said to be a more important link than the first, inasmuch as it is more immediately connected with salvation. It is not hearing or inclining the ear, but faith, which is the link or hand that lays hold on eternal life. Hearing without coming would not only avail us nothing, but greatly add to our condemnation,—"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." Yet hearing is as indispensable to salvation as coming, for there could be no coming without hearing,—"Faith cometh by hearing." Hearing is regarded as so important that the word "Hear," by which we are exhorted the second time in the same passage, includes both inclining the ear and coming,—"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." Hearing, or inclining the ear, however, derives all its importance

in the text from its connection with "coming," as coming derives all its value from its connection with "life."

"Come unto me," is an unspeakably precious link. It is not beyond the reach of any sinner in the whole world in whose ears the joyful sound of salvation is proclaimed. However sinful, and guilty, and miserable, and weak, and helpless that sinner may be, here is that by which he may lay hold on eternal life. Had God said, "Incline your ear, and obey the law, and your soul shall live," no sinner could have laid hold on eternal life in that way; for no mere man has ever yet, or ever will, obey the law of God perfectly,—"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified." Or had God said, "Incline your ear, and atone for your sins, and your soul shall live," we could not have laid hold on eternal life in that way; for nothing that we could offer as an atonement, even our life, and the lives of our children, would suffice. Or suppose God had said, "Incline your ear, and be born again," we could not have laid hold on eternal life by causing ourselves to undergo a new birth; for that is a work that is utterly beyond our power. Or suppose He had said, "Incline your ear, and fashion your soul anew, as the potter fashioneth a piece of clay, and maketh a vessel of honour out of it, and your soul shall live," we could not have laid hold of eternal life in that way; for God only can perform this new creating work. God does not bid us do any of these, or any other things which it is impossible for us to do. He simply bids us come to Him. This we can do, and doing this our souls shall live. Coming to God is coming to Him just as we are, and falling down before Him with no other plea than that we are guilty, and with no other prayer on

our lips than this—"God be merciful to me a sinner." This is faith. This is coming. Can you not do this?

Or coming is simply a look. Such a look as the bitten Israelites were commanded to direct to the brazen serpent. A look away from their own diseases, and suffering, dying bodies, and from all help in man, to the serpent raised on the end of the pole. Had you been an Israelite, could you not, would you not, instantly have looked for life and healing to this sovereign remedy? And is coming to our Saviour-God, the Lord Jesus Christ, just a look? Yes,—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

Or coming is simply receiving God's unspeakable Gift to sinful men, and in Him all they need. Is it difficult for you simply to receive gifts from a benefactor, when he offers them without any conditions whatever? Is it difficult, or does it require great strength, or great efforts on your part, simply to be a receiver? You are thirsty, so thirsty that you are like to die; and if one says, "Look, here is water for you," would you consider it difficult to come and receive it from him? You know you would not. Or you are in debt, and you are about to be taken to prison, your goods and furniture are about to be seized and sold, and your family are about to become beggars and homeless, when one comes forward and says, "Come to me; here is what will pay all your debts," you would not consider it a difficult task to come and receive the money he held out for you? Or you are so ill that you appear to be dying, and a physician visits you who is both able and willing to restore you to health and life, you would not consider it

difficult to take from his hand the draught he held out for you. Oh no; you would take it gladly, and drink it joyfully. Or you are condemned to die, and waiting in prison the day of your execution, when all unexpectedly the jailor enters your cell and says, holding up in his hand a written document, "Here is the king's pardon," you would not consider it very difficult to receive it from him? Is coming to, or believing in, Christ simply receiving Him? Yes,—"As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name." You can have Christ, and in Him eternal life, and all you need, by simply coming to or receiving Him as God's unspeakable gift. You can have pardon, and righteousness, and peace, and purity, and all else that is included in everlasting life—even in grace now, and in glory hereafter—simply by receiving Christ, God's unspeakable gift. Receive Him, then, as He is freely offered to you in the Gospel. God is saying, This is my beloved Son. May you, receiving, respond, This is my beloved Saviour; He is all my salvation, He is all my desire.

Coming is trusting. There are some people whom we find no difficulty in trusting. The little child easily trusts his mother, who has always loved and never deceived him. There are lawyers, and doctors, and other persons whom we have no difficulty in trusting, and to whom we can commit our most precious temporal interests. We come to them because we can trust them. We can rely on their skill, and on what they say. It is very easy to trust them. Coming to God is such trusting Him; it is putting faith in Him, relying on His word or promise. If we do this, He will do for our souls what it is utterly beyond our power

to do for them ourselves—save them, and impart to them everlasting life. Coming, believing, receiving, trusting, are different names or aspects of the same thing, which is faith. "Come to me," then, is a most unspeakably precious link of the golden chain, because it is that by which we are able to lay hold on eternal life. "Come to me; hear, and your soul shall live."

Let us never forget that no one can come to Christ for us. If we do not come we will be condemned, because we have loved the darkness rather than the light. We could have come, but would not. Are not all those who have come indebted to the agency of the Holy Spirit? They are. Yet the Holy Spirit did not come for them. They came themselves. Their liberty of choosing and acting was not in the least interfered with.

A mother, a few yards distant from her little child, stands with outstretched arms, saying to it, "Come to me." The child is getting its first lesson in walking. But it stands timidly and doubting its strength, when at length through the sweet encouraging voice of its mother, it is persuaded, or made willing; now, all alone, it takes its first tottering steps, and is immediately safe in the arms of its fond parent. In like manner there have been humble trembling sinners who felt that they had not strength to come to Jesus, but at length, being taught, and persuaded, and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, they were induced to obey the invitation, "Come to me," and were then safe in the arms of Jesus. The Holy Spirit did not come for them; they came themselves.

A tiny bridge is hurriedly constructed and thrown across a deep and rapid stream, to enable some travellers to

pursue their journey. The one who planned and superintended its construction is the first to cross on it to the other side. The rest refuse to risk their lives on it. They imagined they observed signs of its giving way while their companion was crossing, and resolve, rather than risk their lives, that they will return home again, although this would involve very great loss and suffering. At last, however, the one who has crossed succeeds in assuring his fellow-travellers that the bridge is perfectly strong enough to sustain the weight of any one of them; and now, when thus convinced and made willing, each in his turn crosses on the frail way, and are soon, all of them, on the bank on the other side, safe with him who had gone before. These men all walked across themselves. Their fellow-traveller made them willing, but he did not walk for them.

Many anxious sinners are so oppressed and alarmed by the greatness of their sin and guilt, that they imagine that Christ, though a Saviour for sinners, is not a Saviour that can save them, owing to their heavy load of sin and guilt. Such troubled ones often remain a long time in a state of great fear and perplexity, and they are not made willing until the Holy Spirit teaches and convinces them that, great as their sin and guilt are, there is salvation even for them in Christ. They are taught, and convinced, and persuaded by the Holy Spirit, but not He, but they themselves, came.

Some do not come to God because they are in love with their sins, and will not forsake them. It is not till they are taught by the Holy Spirit, and convinced of their folly, that they are made willing, and being made

willing, they now turn their back on their sin, and comply with the invitation, "Come to me." Yet it is they themselves who come, and not the Holy Spirit who has persuaded them.

Those who do not obey the Gospel invitation need not plead that they cannot come, for they can, but will not. "Ye will not come to me," says Christ, "that ye might have life." Neither can they plead as an excuse for not coming that the Holy Spirit, who has made all those willing who have already come, has not made them willing, for He is as willing to persuade them as He was to persuade all those who now believe. He still accompanies the Word of God with His gracious influences, whether it is read or preached. Our Father in heaven is ever ready to bestow the Holy Spirit on all who ask. Christ encourages us to seek the Spirit. He says: "Ask, and it shall be given you." The Spirit Himself waits to be gracious. It is not the Father and the Son alone that say Come, but the Holy Spirit also,—"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and whosoever will, let him come." "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." Those who do not by this link, "Come unto me," lay hold on eternal life, shall perish. Oh may all of us incline our ear and come, and so perish not, but have everlasting life.

CHAPTER XIV.

"YOUR SOUL SHALL LIVE."

LIFE is the crowning link of our golden chain. Life! What is it? Can we name it without emotion, and muse on it without being awe-struck and lost in wonder? There is nothing with which we can compare it. Life surpasses in value and importance all else in the air above us, in the world and sea around us, or in the earth beneath us. It stands out and apart from all we see, or hear, or feel, and glows with a nature that will not stoop to own affinity with even the greatest and most glorious of all God's other works. Sun, moon, and stars are mere dross in comparison with life. We need not wonder then that it is the immediate gift of God. Man has discovered and done great things. He has weighed the planets and measured the distances that separate them from one another. He can tell the place in the heavens they will fill on a certain day or hour ages before they appear. He has made steam and lightning his servants, and caused them to minister to the well-being of mankind. He has reared gigantic works, which have lasted for many centuries, and some of which, such as the pyramids, seem as if they would never decay. He has

sculptured out of stone and marble, and painted on canvas, wall, and ceiling, forms of beauty which have lasted for ages, and may last for ages to come. He has poured out the treasures of his mind on divers themes and in divers manners, in books, that will probably perish only with the world itself. But great and wonderful as his gifts and attainments are, he cannot originate life. However great his genius, and talents, and skill, and learning, and works, they never have, and never will, enable him to impart life even to a dead fly. To restore life to a fly or a weed that has ceased to live, is a work beyond his power. Here is a pea. It does not look like an object beyond man's power to make. Does he not know all the elements of which it is composed? He does. Can none of our great men, then, make a pea? No. They can easily make millions and tens of millions of objects so closely to resemble peas that you could not distinguish them from real peas, and yet life would be latent only in the God-made pea, and not in a single one of the many millions of the man-made imitations. These, if sown in the ground, would rot, and soon become transformed into earth; but that, if sown, would take root, spring up a living plant, and bear fruit after its kind. What a mystery is our own life! Our beginning to be, our birth, our consciousness from the moment we saw the light of day till now! Our present consciousness! What a marvel is this life of ours! How has it begun? What is its real nature? How is it that we think, and know, and purpose? We cannot solve these questions. The origin and hidden springs of life are beyond our ken. What we do know is, that God is the author and sustainer

of our existence. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Very precious has God made life to us. Deep in our nature He has planted a shrinking from whatever would endanger its safety. That which will extinguish our candle of life is well called the king of terrors. We so cleave to life that we are willing to part with all things else to save it. "All that a man hath will he give for his life." Even many of the aged and the infirm, to whom one would think that death would be but a relief, are sometimes heard to say when the hour of their departure is evidently drawing near, that if the Lord will, they would like to live a little longer. How few there are, young or old, to whom life is not sweet. Not only will a man part with all his gold and treasures to save his life, but so very precious are the lives of those dear to us, that when these lives are in danger, we are willing to part with all we have, if by such a sacrifice we can ward off the fell destroyer. When our dearest earthly treasure has ceased to breathe, how gladly we would part with our all, even to our last farthing, to any one who could restore the vital breath to our friend; and how cheerfully we would resume our life's journey together with the lost one found again, even though penniless and houseless. To thousands and millions of our fellow beings nothing appears so valuable as the life we have now been speaking of; and yet there is a life that is infinitely more precious. This is the life that hangs on hearing and coming—soul-life. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." This life is as superior to our natural life as the soul is superior to our body. While all that a man hath he will give for his

life, millions of Christ's true disciples have testified in prison, at the gibbet, and at the stake, as well as in countless other ways, that they were willing to part with their natural life rather than lose or endanger the life of their souls.

The lifeless soul is not dead in the same sense as a dead body is. Though dead, the soul still exists, and is conscious of existence. Yet the moral change which it undergoes in conversion is so great as to be described as a new creation, a passing from darkness to light, and from death unto life. God is as really the author of soul-life as of any other kind of life. To originate spiritual life in ourselves or in others is a work as far beyond our power as that of restoring life to a dead body, or devising and forming a seed that will have wrapped up in it the germ of life. The change, though not from a state of non-existence, is in many respects as great as if it were. Newborn souls see God and others as if with new eyes. Their feelings towards God, and His people, and many things, are totally changed, and towards many other things modified or intensified. They are alive to many things now to which they were before utterly insensible, and to many things that were wont before to move them powerfully they are now as indifferent as the world and its concerns are to those who have ceased to live. Their souls have been quickened by a new life, and they are now animated by new and glorious hopes which are not bounded by time nor based on vain speculations and illusory dreams, but on the sure promise of the almighty and unchanging Jehovah. In a word, they are new creatures. Old things have passed away, and all things

have become new. The sentence of condemnation is no longer hanging over them; for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." The heart of stone has become a heart of flesh. The filial relation to God is realised by the new-born child with a thrill of joy that finds vent, as it looks up into God's face, in these beautiful and confiding words, "Abba, Father." The image of Him who is the brightness of the Father's glory is stamped on his soul, and though faint at first, by reason of sin that still remains in him, by the grace of God he resolves to keep sin under, so that he may daily die unto sin and live unto righteousness, and that thus the image of Jesus may grow brighter and brighter, until he is completely conformed to the perfect pattern. To live, then, means not merely to be born again, but, being born, to live. "Hear, and your souls shall live."

Life implies enjoyment. The sources of its delights are innumerable. For ear, and eye, and taste, and touch, and heart, and mind there are inexhaustible supplies of what they crave for in this beautiful world. No wonder life is sweet. Spiritual life also implies enjoyment. The joy that is experienced by a soul when it hears and comes, when it is born again, when it passes from death unto life, when it is created anew in Christ Jesus, when it first experiences impulses to holiness, and when it first is animated with the glorious hope of immortal bliss, is a joy that is unspeakable. And this joy is not confined to the sensations of the new birth, but belongs to the whole after life, of which the new birth is but the beginning. The soul continues to hear and come, and as it hears and comes, its joys are deepened. Christ, the life of the soul

at the first, will ever continue to be its life, and nourishment, and joy. His person, and word, and doctrines, and ordinances, and promises are the drink and food of the soul's life. He is that bread which can truly satisfy the hunger of the soul, that water which can quench the thirst and gratify all the longings of the heart. The new man, as he appropriates Christ, is filled with a joy that is unspeakable, and animated with a hope that is full of glory. The joys, and aspirations, and hopes of mere human life, at the best, however great, are all destined to perish; they are light as vanity, compared with those of that life of which conversion is the beginning, grace the continuance, and glory the end and consummation.

God, as we have seen, is the author of spiritual as well as of all other kinds of life. None will ever live unless quickened by Him, and none will ever continue spiritually alive without His gracious aid. Are those, then, who are dead in trespasses and sins responsible for their condition? The Scriptures testify that they are; for although they cannot create themselves anew, they can do with respect to their salvation what God calls upon them to do. They can believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved. In the third chapter of John, where the new birth is so strikingly spoken of by Jesus, it is clearly declared that with respect to salvation man has a province as well as God. While man is declared to be born of God, it is as emphatically declared that whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life. While God makes spiritually alive all those who are born again, He does so not apart from, but in unison with, the agency of man. In conversion, as well as in sanctification, we are fellow-

workers with God. God saves or makes alive none against their will. Those who are born again are those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same doctrines that are illustrated in our three-linked golden chain as in the third chapter of John's Gospel. Life is the gift of God, yet on man's side it hangs on hearing and coming. "Hear, come, and your soul shall live." Life is the most precious link of this glorious chain. Without it the other two are nothing. They were made for it, not it for them. They are the hands that grasp, but it is the prize, the unfading crown of life, that is grasped. Were believers to let go their hold of this, and in place of it to lay hold on aught else, however valuable, that instant the chain would lose its infinite value; the fine gold would become dim, and from shining with immortal beauty and life would become a thing of time, and in the long run no better than a clod of the valley. If you have not yet been born again, we entreat you to delay not the most important business that can possibly engage your attention. Bless God that life, spiritual and eternal, is within your reach. God is waiting, and is anxious to make you alive. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." "He that believeth on me," saith Jesus, "though he were dead, yet shall he live." If you have been quickened, continue hearing, coming, believing, that your spiritual life may be promoted, and that it may be more lively. The phrase "I came, I saw, I conquered" has received a world-wide fame, but it pales before the unfading beauty and the everlasting glory of these three —"Hear—come—and your soul shall live."

CHAPTER XV.

"AN EVERLASTING COVENANT."

"And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."—ISAIAH lv. 3.

THIS is what is called the new covenant (Jer. xxxi. 31), or the covenant of grace. God made such a covenant with David, not only as an individual, but as representative of God's believing people (2 Sam. xxiii. 5; 1 Chron. xvii. 11-15; Ps. lxxxix. 3, 4).

Is it David, the son of Jesse, who is mentioned in the text, or Christ, who is sometimes called David? (Jer. xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24). Much may be said in favour of both views. We lean to the latter. It is the same person grammatically who is referred to in verses fourth and fifth, and while verse fourth might apply to the son of Jesse, yet the language applies with much greater force to his illustrious Son and Lord, while verse fifth cannot possibly refer to any other than Christ. If the subject of these three verses is the same person, he must be the promised Messiah. That David, the son of Jesse, is spoken of in one verse typically, and in another antitypically, is a view which we think to be untenable. But if David, the son of Jesse, be the person named in the third verse, the

mercies, though called his, are in a much more important sense the mercies of Christ, inasmuch as they are all treasured up in, and flow from, Him. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen;" and if the son of Jesse was a witness, a leader, and a commander, he was but a dim shadow, in these capacities, of Him who is the light of the world and the captain of our salvation. Whatever allusions there may be in these verses to the typical David, we will treat them as having mainly for their subject our Lord Jesus Christ, and the benefits which flow through Him to all who believe in His name.

The "*I*" and the "*you*" in the text stand for two parties formerly separated from each other by a wide gulf. It was a great, fixed, and impassable gulf, as far as those represented by the "*you*" were unable to span it; but He who is represented by "*I*" threw the everlasting covenant across the chasm, and, by this means, bridged it over; or rather, Christ, the chief mercy and mediator of the covenant, is the bridge or way between God and man, reaching from the one to the other, and laying His hand on both.

The difference in nature between these two—*I* and *you*—is infinitely great. The one is the infinite, eternal, unchangeable, and independent Jehovah, the others but of yesterday, and dependent on Him for every breath they draw,—"In Him we live, and move, and have our being." It is obvious, then, that this covenant must differ materially in many respects from covenants that are made between man and man. Men may be mutually bound to each other, but a finite creature cannot bind the infinite Jehovah. Men may, and generally do, in

covenants agree, or rather bind themselves, to confer benefits on each other. Creatures, however, cannot confer benefits on the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift. It is clear, then, that if conditions are to be sustained, they must be sustained by man, and if benefits are to be conferred, the benefactor must be God. God may be said to bind Himself. His word of promise may be said to be His covenant, and that is an absolutely certain guarantee that He will fulfil all His promises. The conditions He imposes on those with whom He enters into this covenant are simple and easy, and such as sinners can comply with. The terms are the same as those upon which life is offered. The everlasting covenant and all its mercies, as well as life, hang on the apparently slender links of hearing and coming,—"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

The mercies of this covenant are spiritual, sure, and everlasting.

1. They are spiritual. Though temporal favours are not excluded from the covenant, yet its chief mercies are spiritual. It is these that form the glorious theme of our chapter from its beginning to its end. They are its alpha and its omega, its all and in all. Our text is the key-note that unites and harmonises them all. The most desirable and valuable things of this world are laid under tribute as emblems, with which the whole chapter glows, to show forth the unspeakable preciousness of the benefits of the covenant, and their indispensable necessity for the soul's salvation. Here pardon, and peace, and life,

and light, and righteousness, and strength, and guidance, and joy, and other soul-gladdening benefits, are offered to us without money and without price. These, and all other blessings that are needful for the soul's welfare here and hereafter, are embraced in the bonds of the new covenant. Without these blessings our souls could not live nor enjoy life. If the benefits, however precious in many respects, and even sure and eternal, had not also been spiritual, they would have failed to satisfy our souls. Although all that the eye has seen, and the ear heard, and the heart has conceived of earthly things were made sure to us, and that for ever, all would not suffice to impart true peace and lasting joy to our hearts. While we carry about with us sins unpardoned, hearts unrenewed, affections unsanctified, and wills at enmity with God, we must be wretched and miserable. Without the sunshine of God's countenance we cannot be but unhappy. We might, no doubt, continue to exist, but our life would be an everlasting living death. "In His favour," and in His alone, "is life," the only life that is really desirable; and "His loving kindness," even the sure mercies of David, is better than life. It is of these mercies, and of these only, that any one can truly say with David: "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire."

2. They are sure mercies. They are so (1) because God has promised them. A man whose word may be said to be as good as his bond may promise us certain benefits, but he may forget; or, though he do not forget, he may fail to give us what he promised, not through lack of will, but through lack of ability. Or he may die, and we our-

selves may die before the time he purposed to give and we to receive the benefit. As with individuals, so with banks, companies, and governments. We may have as great confidence as can reasonably be placed in combinations of men, and may enter into covenants or agreements with them, yet we can never be absolutely sure that they will be able to fulfil their engagements to us. Our investments with this or that party may be more or less sure, but we have no absolute guarantee that even the most apparently stable of human institutions will be able to implement their engagements. This or that company may be said to be as sure as the Bank of England. But even the Bank of England may fail. Revolution, war, famine, the plague, and other calamities may so ruin a kingdom as to involve the wealthiest of its inhabitants and institutions in utter bankruptcy. Men are accustomed to say, this or that is a safe or sure investment, but these words must ever be taken with less or more qualification. The only absolutely sure mercies are the sure mercies of David. There is nothing absolutely safe or sure that depends on the word, promise, oath, or covenant, or solvency of men. If the mercies of the new covenant were only as sure as the Bank of England, our souls could not safely and entirely rely on them.

A noble lord (Lord Rosebery) in his place in Parliament, said of the Tripartite Treaty (1856)—a treaty by which Great Britain, France, and Austria engaged to maintain the integrity of the Turkish empire—"He regarded the language of that treaty as so strict that it left no loophole, and he would be glad to know how any of these powers could escape from the guarantees they then

gave." Lord Derby, replying, said—and knowing that all Europe was listening—"No treaties can be, or are intended to be, eternal. They are framed with reference to existing circumstances, and though I do not say whether this is or is not the case in regard to the treaty of 1856, yet nothing can be more probable in European diplomacy than the recognition of the fact that treaties do, by the lapse of time and the force of circumstances, become obsolete." God's covenant or promise, however, is absolutely sure. Neither the lapse of time, nor any circumstance whatever, will ever cause it to become obsolete. Men may forget, but God never forgets. Men may, through circumstances over which they have no control, become unable or unwilling to fulfil their engagements, but God can never become unable or unwilling to fulfil all His promises. Men may not live to do what they have promised, but God ever liveth to bestow His promised gifts on His people. The resources of the wealthiest companies and nations may fail, but God's resources can never be exhausted. He Himself is the infinite, boundless, unfathomable, and ever-flowing fountain of blessing, from which, through Christ, His taking people can never fail to receive all they need for their souls' joy and salvation.

The promises of the Lord, then, are sure, not merely as the promises of the best and most faithful of men are sure, but absolutely sure—sure beyond the possibility of a doubt. Not one word of all that the Lord hath promised shall fail,—"My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Ps. lxxxix. 34). "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it

by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Heb. vi. 17-20).

(2.) The mercies of the covenant are sure, because the believer's faith cannot fail. If it could, then he might be deprived of the mercies after having possessed them for a season, so that he could never count upon them as sure to him. His receiving the promises depends on his faith as well as on God's word. Faith may be said to be the hand that lays hold on Him, in whom all the promises are yea and amen. Laying hold by faith on Christ is the same as laying hold on the promises, for they are all yea and amen in Him. Our grasp of Him may be more or less feeble, but as we lay hold on Him He lays hold on us at the same time, and with a firm, yea, with an almighty grasp, and will never suffer any one to pluck us out of His hand. Not that He holds us mechanically, or against our will, for the same blessed influences that induced us to come to Him at the first, will never altogether cease to be operative. One of the special promises of this new and better covenant is, I will pour my Spirit upon you. He who, by the sweet persuasive influences of the Holy Spirit, induces us at the first to hear and come to Him, will never entirely withdraw these gracious influences. "He which hath begun a good work" in us will continue it. Those who truly come to Jesus will continue ever after to come to Him. Their faith may at times be weak, but it will never utterly fail. This link

which connects their souls with the fountain of living waters will never be broken. What has been called the covenant of works has for ever become a broken covenant, because man has failed, and ever will fail, to fulfil its conditions,—"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Rom. iii. 20). But to those who incline the ear, and come unto God, the everlasting covenant shall never be broken, not only because God cannot break His word, but also because the believer's faith cannot utterly fail.

(3.) The mercies of the covenant are sure, because they are unchangeable in their nature. Temporal or earthly benefits are subject to change. Persons and things often undergo such changes that we are unable to enjoy them as we once did. We have expected that they would have continued to afford us the same or even greater pleasure, but we have experienced, at least in many instances, that in this respect they were not sure mercies. We can never be sure that persons and things will retain the same excellences that lead us now to prize and enjoy them. The only mercies that never change are the sure mercies of David; like their great Giver, they are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; they make glad the hearts of God's children, and because they are unchangeable, will continue to gladden them for ever. They will never lose aught of their sweetness, of their preciousness, or of their power to meet all the wants, and satisfy all the desires, of the soul. They are sure mercies, then, not only because God promises them, and the believer's faith, which cannot fail, lays hold on them, but also, because they are unchangeable in their nature.

Although the blessings were spiritual in their nature, if they were not also sure, they would fail to be a portion to the soul. The soul cannot truly rely on anything that is not sure. Sureness is one of the indispensable qualities of the mercies of the covenant. Without it their sweetness and preciousness would be almost gone. What though our sins were forgiven, if it were possible for God at some future time to cease to forgive? What though we now experienced the enlightening, sanctifying, and elevating influences of the Holy Spirit, if to-morrow, or next day, or even years hence, these could be withdrawn from us? What though we could now look up into the smiling face of God, and confidingly and joyfully exclaim, Abba, Father, if the time could ever come when He would no more lift up the light of His countenance upon us? It is not so, however. He may, indeed, have occasion to correct us for our sins and our backslidings, and to visit us with chastisements as necessary discipline to strengthen our faith and promote our holiness. He may even at times see it to be necessary to deal with us as if He had forgotten His covenant. But it is not as it seems. "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. liv. 8, 10).

What though by faith we now lay hold on Christ, the fountain of spiritual blessings, if it were possible for us at some future time to let go our hold? But our faith

will not fail. Christ Himself is praying for us, that our faith fail not. His prayers are all answered. What though we are now receiving the life-giving and the joy-imparting blessings that are flowing to us from the fountain of living waters, if these waters could change their nature, and from being sweet become bitter, and from being the water of life become the water of death? But they will never change. Like their Author, they are unchangeable, and therefore sure mercies.

The mercies, then, we repeat, are sure, because it is God, who cannot lie, who promises them; the believer's faith, that cannot fail, that lays hold on them; and because they themselves are unchangeable in their nature.

3. The mercies of the covenant are everlasting,—"I will make an everlasting covenant with you." The old or Levitical covenant was ratified by the blood of bulls and of goats, to impress the Israelities with its binding character. However, it was not intended to last for ever. It was connected with a system of types—shadows, no doubt, of good things to come—and through these, those who had faith descried the promises, though afar off, and embraced them. But the covenant waxed old, and gave place to the new and better covenant—a covenant that was never to grow old, but was to last for ever. This new covenant has been ratified with the blood of the great Victim, our Lord Jesus Christ, and it will never pass away. It is an everlasting covenant (Heb. xiii. 20), and as such is superior to the old or Levitical covenant, to the covenant of works, and to all the other covenants mentioned in the Word of God. Its mercies, like itself, are everlasting. This is a great word. As our mind tries to grasp its

import, and while we ponder on it, do not human life, and all things seen and temporal, sink into utter insignificance? That which is temporal can scarcely be compared with that which is eternal. Many of the things with which human life is bound up are valued according to the time they are expected to last. How infinitely valuable, then, must be those mercies which are to last for ever. It is true, as far as this life is concerned, man needs but little here, nor needs that little long. Yet there are multitudes of fair objects in this beautiful world, which are not absolutely necessary to our present life, that we fondly cleave to; and we are saddened by the thought that on them, and all things here below, are inscribed, "No abiding." As the flower withers so do our most cherished earthly treasures. Not to mention many objects to which this applies, think of husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters that are ever and anon being torn from one another by the ruthless hand of Death. As we gaze on the face of loved ones, how ardently we wish that instead of "No abiding" being legible on their fair countenances we could read the words, "We will abide with you for ever." While the mere wants of the body can be met by perishing things like itself, it is otherwise with the soul. It refuses to have its hunger and thirst satisfied with anything, however precious, that is not eternal. God, who made the soul, knows the depth of its longings, and has promised to meet these, not with temporal, but with everlasting, mercies. The peace, and the righteousness, and the joy, and the hope, as well as all the other mercies of the covenant, are to last for ever,—"In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Although the mercies promised were spiritual and sure, had they not also been eternal our souls would have refused to accept of them as an adequate portion to satisfy their longings. Even though the mercies were spiritual, and sure to last for a million of years, if at the end of that far distant period they were to be taken from us, we should be unable to say of the covenant, "This is all my salvation and all my desire." The very thought that the mercies were to come to an end would embitter our enjoyment of them. The looking forward to the period of deprivation would be misery itself. Let us call upon our soul and all that is within us to bless and to magnify the Lord, that the mercies of the new and better covenant are not only spiritual and sure but also everlasting, It has all the features or qualities necessary to render it such that we can, with entire and unwavering assurance, rest our souls' salvation on it. Its mercies are spiritual, its mercies are sure, and its mercies are everlasting. It is because these are its attributes that multitudes since David's day have found in these mercies a satisfying portion to their souls. Each true believer can adopt his words and say, "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire."

Those who have been offered but have refused these mercies have no excuse for not accepting of them. It is an aggravation of their sin, and folly, and ingratitude that the terms on which they are asked to accept of them are so easy and simple. Hear; and hearing, come; and coming, take. These are the terms, and they could not be more free or gracious. The greatest mercies that God can

bestow are to be got for the taking. The terms are such that you are able, if you are willing, to comply with them. It is no doubt true that the Holy Spirit has made all those willing who have already come and tasted that the Lord is gracious, but his gracious influences are free to you as they were to them. Even now He may be striving with you. It is not the Father and the Son only, but the Holy Spirit also that willeth your salvation. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

CHAPTER XVI.

"I HAVE GIVEN HIM FOR A WITNESS."

"Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people (*Heb.*, peoples)."—ISAIAH lv. 4.

THE giver is God. The gift is Christ. The receivers are the peoples. In the preceding verse, the gift in its entirety, embracing all the mercies of the covenant, is held forth to us. In this verse three of these mercies are singled out, and stand apart—Christ a Witness, Christ a Leader, Christ a Commander.

1. Christ is a Witness. There is a sense in which He was a Witness before His advent. Persons and things that prefigured Him were witnesses to God's holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, and truth. They all taught, though dimly in comparison with the clearer light of Gospel times, the way of salvation through the blood of the coming Messiah. The prophets who taught and prophesied to the people made Him their grand theme; and in speaking and writing they were moved by the Holy Spirit, imparted to them by Him as well as by the Father.

Christ was a Witness after His advent, through His

apostles, who were appointed and qualified by Him to testify and declare to all people the truth concerning Himself, especially the good news that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Among the last words He spake on earth were those addressed to His apostles: "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts i. 8). His true servants in the ministry, and, though it may be in a lesser degree, all His other true disciples, are still His witnesses. Through them He still testifies to the children of men that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should be saved by believing on His name.

While Christ may be said to have been a Witness both before and after His advent, yet it is in His own person He is "*the* witness," even the "faithful and true witness" (Rev. iii. 14). None that went before, and none that came after Him, were His equals as a Witness. They, as witnesses, were dependent on Him. They were appointed and qualified by Him. He received His appointment direct from the Father. He was pre-eminently *the* Witness to the old dispensation. In Him all its types found their antitype, and all its shadows their substance. The new and better covenant itself was confirmed by Him, for it was not finally ratified till it was sealed with His shed blood. The truth of God was never by prophet, or apostle, or evangelist, taught as it was by Him. He was the great revealer of God's will to men. None ever

were so closely associated with the Father as He, and consequently none could unfold God's will as He could. "The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Whoever testified to the excellency of the moral law, and showed forth its exceeding depth and breadth, as He has in the sermon on the mount? Who has ever testified by speech or pen to the beauty and power of true religion as He has in those for ever unrivalled parables which shine on the Gospel page, not with diminishing, but with ever-increasing lustre? Who has ever testified like Him to the sufficiency of the mercies of the covenant, to refresh, and nourish, and strengthen, and satisfy God's people, as He has in those discourses in which, under the emblems of bread and water and His own flesh and blood, He speaks so tenderly and lovingly of the gift of Himself for the salvation of the soul? Read and ponder all that He said while He tabernacled on earth, and we are persuaded, whether you are one of His disciples or not, you will agree with the testimony of the officers of the Pharisees: "Never man spake like this man."

Let us sit at His feet, and receive His testimony. Every word He has spoken is true. He is the truth Himself, and cannot possibly but speak the truth. While the whole Bible is true, and able by God's blessing to make us wise unto salvation, and while all its words should be sweeter to our taste than honey, may the very words that dropped from the lips of Him who is the faithful and true Witness be the sweetest and most precious of all to us, and by them especially may we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus may we receive and improve God's gift of Christ as a Witness to us.

2. Christ is a Leader. He is not only a Prophet to teach and to testify, but also a Leader for His people to imitate and follow. He hath left "us an example that ye should follow His steps." There is no other perfect example for our imitation. The best and holiest of God's people, who have lived both before and after His advent, have not been without many blemishes in their character. Abraham, Moses, David, John, and Paul, however distinguished for faith, or meekness, or holiness, or love, or zeal, or other graces, did not attain to perfection here, and so none of them as a whole are models for us to copy. Christ, however, is a perfect pattern. This is the model for us to copy. Others we may follow, but only so far as they followed Christ. In the journey through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan, Christians are called upon to follow Christ, as the Israelites followed the fiery cloudy pillar. Christ is ever in the forefront of those He is leading on to the better land. He goeth before, and beckons us to follow,—"Follow me." Were we to walk in some of the footsteps of even the best and holiest of men who have ever lived, we should be often stumbling, and falling, and going astray; but every footstep of Jesus is a safe one for us to plant our steps in, and one, too, that leads in the path to heaven. If we follow Him, we will never lose the way. Every step we take will be one that will bring us nearer to the better land. In following Him, like the Israelites who followed the cloudy pillar, we shall meet with less or more of privations, and trials, and difficulties, and enemies; but with Him for our great Leader, none of these hindering things, however much they may sometimes retard, shall ever be

able to bar our progress. However many and powerful our spiritual foes both within us and around us may be, with Him for the Captain of our salvation we shall be more than conquerors. However weak and defenceless we may be in ourselves, we are strong in Him. His encouraging words to animate us in the conflict are, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Christ is admirably and perfectly qualified in every respect to be the Leader of His people. He has been appointed by the highest Authority,—"I," says God, "have given him for a leader." He is a qualified Leader. He possesses the necessary qualifications in the highest degree. Is knowledge necessary in a leader? He is omniscient, He knoweth all things. Is wisdom necessary? In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom (Col. ii. 3). Is power necessary? He is the mighty God,—"Strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand" (Ps. lxxxix. 13). Is truthfulness necessary? He is full of grace and truth. Is sympathy with His followers necessary? He is bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh. In all their affliction He was afflicted,—"It hath pleased the Father to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." In these and all other respects He has all qualifications or attributes to fit Him to be the great Leader of the many millions who have already and will yet enrol themselves under His banner.

May our resolution now and ever be, Blessed Jesus, we will follow Thee. When tempted to walk in other paths, let us look to Him, and ask His gracious aid to enable us to follow Him and Him only. When tempted to be proud,

let us remember Him who stooped from the highest heights of glory to the manger and the cross. When tempted to be selfish, let us remember Him who though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. When tempted to retaliate, let us remember Him who when He was reviled, reviled not again. When tempted to weary in well-doing, let us remember Him who went about continually doing good. When assailed by the arch-enemy of souls, let us not parley with Him for a moment, but remembering the example of our Lord and Leader, instantly and peremptorily bid him begone in our Master's own words, "Get thee behind me, Satan." In these and all other ways, let us follow the Lamb whithersoever He leadeth us. May we ever hear His voice saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." So following Him, He will lead us on to victory and to glory.

3. Christ is a Commander. He has appointed every one of His followers their place in the Church and in the world. He has promulgated the laws by which they are to regulate their conduct in the various circumstances in which they may be placed. The ten commandments expounded by Him are emphatically His commandments. He Himself explicitly says of those of them which relate to our duties to our fellow-men: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Some people are very good at making laws which they have no intention of obeying themselves. Others there are who tell people what they ought to do, but fail sadly in doing the same things themselves, not from want of sincerity, but

from the imperfections of their own character, to which the best of men are subject. The more we can practise what we exhort others to do, the more likely are we to be obeyed. Practice is better than precept. In this respect, Christ as a Commander is unrivalled. "I come," He said, "to do thy will, O God." And He did it. No man but Himself ever rendered entire obedience to the commandments of God. He hath magnified the law and made it honourable. His exposition of it He illustrated by His own example. The obedience He claims from us is what He Himself has rendered to the Father. There are, indeed, some commandments of His which He Himself cannot be said to have obeyed. They are such as those which arise out of some of His relations to us, and out of our sinfulness and need. This one, for example: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Our constant aim should be to render implicit obedience to the orders of our Divine Commander. Our failures in duty should humble and grieve us, but not cause us to despair. They should lead us to ask forgiveness, and to make fresh resolves, in dependence on His gracious aid, to do whatsoever He has commanded us. If we thus accept of Him as our Commander, and in this spirit seek to obey and honour His laws, it will be our blessedness to experience that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light, and that, in the keeping of His commandments there is a great reward.

Very beautifully, strikingly, and winsomely are life and salvation, yea, all the blessings of the everlasting covenant offered to us on the easy and simple terms of hear-

ing, coming, and receiving. We can become possessed of them on no other conditions. The slightest alloy of our own merit mixed with faith would put them beyond our reach. Yet we should never forget that when by faith we first lay hold on Christ, are born again, pardoned and made righteous, receive out of His fulness grace for grace, and become heirs of exceeding great and precious promises, all this does not imply a life of inglorious ease or rest on our part, as if we had no more to do than simply to enjoy our new spiritual life, the blessedness of forgiveness, and the hopes of future glory. The very reverse of this is the case, as many of the benefits of the covenant themselves clearly imply. If any, from the tenor of the three first verses of the chapter, so misconceive of the grace of God as to imagine that they teach otherwise, the fourth verse, if they will listen to it, would clear away their misconceptions; for among the benefits of the covenant are these three,—Christ a Witness, Christ a Leader, Christ a Commander. What do these offices of Christ imply? He is a Witness whose testimony we are constantly to rely on; we are ever to be seeking to be taught and edified by Him, otherwise we cannot make progress heavenwards. He is a Leader whose example we are ever to be copying, and whose footsteps we are ever to be following. Under this banner we are called to fight, and we are never to lay down the weapons of our warfare until the battle has been fought, and the final and complete victory has been won. He is a Commander whose laws are to be the rule of our whole life.

We are not at liberty to accept of some and to reject

others of the benefits of the everlasting covenant. It would receive many acceptors who now reject it if this were the case. Many would have no objections to pardon, and peace, and justification, and heaven, if these were not inseparably linked with other gifts. If we would have pardon, and peace, and heaven, we must, along with them, besides numerous other covenant blessings, receive Christ as a Witness, a Leader, and a Commander. Those who are unwilling to be taught by the faithful and true Witness, or who turn a deaf ear to the invitation of this great Leader—"Follow me,"—or treat with indifference these touchstone words of the great Commander, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," cannot, while they manifest this spirit, become heirs of glory.

While only those who accept of Christ as He is freely offered to them will be taught, and led, and ruled by Him, yet it is a glorious truth that is announced in the text, that He is offered not to the people of a single nation, not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles, not to a "people," but to the "peoples," yea, to the whole world. Well, therefore, are the glad tidings of great joy introduced by a "Behold," or "Lo," "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the *peoples*, a leader and commander to the *peoples*." How clearly this passage points to the Gospel era! The very day that "He" who is the subject of this passage was born, an angel-herald announced to the shepherds on Bethlehem's plain the same glorious news as those of our text, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city

of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And so transported with joy were the accompanying angels, that their joy burst into this song of songs: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

CHAPTER XVII.

"NATIONS SHALL RUN UNTO THEE."

"Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee."—ISAIAH lv. 5.

IN general, words of exclamation should be sparingly used. When frequently employed, they weaken rather than strengthen what is said. Unless their object is to draw attention to matters of far more than ordinary importance, they are better dispensed with. But although such words occur three times in the first five verses of our chapter, yet here they do not occur too often, because of the overwhelming interest of the subjects to which they point. "Ho," as previously remarked, is a very beautiful and striking introduction to the whole chapter. It is, however, more closely associated with the three first verses. When we reflect on the misery of sinners, the danger they are in of perishing, and how the word "Ho" seeks to arouse them to a sense of this misery and danger, and to the greatness and preciousness of the blessings freely offered, this loud yet joyful sound vibrates through our souls as if its echoes would never cease.

The fourth verse of the chapter is begun by the excla-

mation, "Behold." Although the blessings to which it invites attention are, no doubt, included in those of the everlasting covenant, yet here three of these are specified. The blessings which are more specially indicated in the three first verses are such as bring peace and joy and hope to our souls, and such as are to be got by coming or hearing or taking; and they do not—at least apparently—imply present and continuous labour on our part. Buying, it is true, is spoken of; but then it is buying without money and without price. Labour is referred to, but it is labour we are to cease from, in order to eat of the good things prepared for the nourishment and joy of our souls. The blessings mentioned in the fourth verse are also to be got for the taking. We can only be takers. God is ever the giver. The fourth verse, after the exclamation, "Behold," begins with, "I have given." May our resolve now and ever be, We will take. We will take of the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. If we ever give to God, we can only give what He has already given us. Although this fourth verse, as well as the preceding verses, implies that we must be takers of the benefits of the Lord if ever we enjoy them; yet the particular benefits mentioned in this verse indicate more clearly than those in the three first verses a state of constant activity for the soul's welfare, and ceaseless exertions to promote the Lord's cause on the part of all those who become partakers of the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting covenant. So that "Behold" begins a new section of our chapter, and the gifts to which it invites our attention are so great that this exclamation, "Behold," magnifies its office in seeking to fix our admir-

ing gaze upon them. If any should so misunderstand or misinterpret the first three verses as to suppose that the acceptance of the benefits of the covenant relieves the receiver of efforts on his part, either for his own soul's welfare or that of others, this fourth verse lifts up a warning voice to such; these benefits clearly imply the reverse, for here is a Witness of whom we are ever to be learning, a Leader we are ever to be following, a Commander we are ever to be obeying,—"Behold, I have given him to be a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people."

Another, and the last section of our chapter, begins with verse fifth; this is also introduced by a "Behold," and it is the climax of the three exclamations. Hitherto there is no hint given that although great and precious benefits are offered to the children of men any would accept of them; and although Christ is held forth as a Witness, Leader, and Commander, there is no hint that any would accept of His testimony and teaching, or that any would enrol themselves under His banner, and follow Him as their Leader; nor that any would become subject to Him as their King-ruler, submit to His authority, and obey His commandments. But the third and remaining section of our chapter is wholly, with the exception of one or two verses (perhaps used parenthetically), taken up with predicating the certain accomplishment of God's word, the certain success of Christ's reign, its ultimate wide and universal extension, and the transformation into His own likeness of the countless millions who would believe on His name and own Him as their Lord. "Behold" in beginning this concluding section of our chapter could not

be more nobly employed,—"Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee." Notice—

1. The caller and the called are not known to each other. Thou, the Messiah, shalt call a nation that thou knowest not. How can this be, when Christ as God is omniscient? He knoweth every one of His creatures. There are no individuals of whose existence, history, thoughts, and desires, and all else concerning them, He is not thoroughly cognisant. "I am He," He saith, "which searcheth the reins and hearts." He knows alike the meanest and most obscure of His subjects, as well as kings who sit on the lofty eminence of thrones. It is not in this but in another sense that He is said not to know the Gentiles, who in our text, in contradistinction to the Jews, are called "a nation that thou knowest not." We are in the custom of saying of persons we know a great deal about, "We do not know them," meaning we are not on terms of friendship or intimacy with them. We do not treat them as we do those we know in this better sense of knowing. Christ as God had known the Jewish nation in this latter sense. They were His chosen and peculiar people. He regarded them with peculiar favour. They were favoured with His revealed will, and were its custodiers. To them He gave lawgivers, and Levites, and priests, and prophets, and many signal favours. To them "pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of

whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 4, 5). In this sense of peculiar favour, however, He had not hitherto known the Gentiles. They were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise (Eph. ii. 11, 12).

The Gentiles did not know Christ. "Nations that knew not thee." It was in one of the two senses of knowing that Christ knew not the Gentiles, but they did not know Christ in either sense of knowing. Not only did they not regard the Lord God of Israel with favour while they worshipped idols, but they were ignorant of His very existence, not to speak of the second Person of the Godhead, the promised Messiah. They could not be said to be guilty of ignorance of the Messiah, as He had not been revealed to them; but they, or at least the vast majority of them, were guilty of ignorance of the one living and true God, who had clearly manifested Himself to them in the works of creation, in which as in a mirror He was reflected. So that in not knowing Him, as far as these showed forth His eternal power and Godhead, and giving themselves up to the worship of false gods, they were without excuse (Rom. i. 20). So clearly did the heavens and the earth show forth God's power and wisdom and goodness, that the knowledge of God could not be entirely kept out of the minds of some of the heathen, without an effort on their part to shut it out. When it entered their minds, they did not relish it, as it rebuked their sinful lusts and pleasures. "They did not," we are told, "like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom. i. 28). This sweeping condemnation may not apply to

all the Gentiles without exception, for no doubt there have been some who have sincerely and earnestly sought to know God by studying the works of nature, and have not shunned but courted the knowledge of Him, and tried to look up from nature to nature's God. Yet from the book of nature they could learn nothing of God as a God of mercy. They could not know God as the God of salvation. The book of nature has no trace of the way of life through the Messiah. Of this best of knowledge the Gentiles were in total ignorance until "the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. iv. 4).

2. Christ's call to the Gentiles, and their response to it. *Christ's call*—Thou shalt call a nation that Thou knowest not. This, that Christ would call the Gentiles, was one of the greatest themes, not only of Isaiah, but of the other prophets. It was this that was the subject of the early promise—The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. It was this that was the substance of the promise to Abraham—"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." It was this, on the very day of Christ's birth, that the angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds on Bethlehem's plain—"I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people;" and it was this that formed the subject of the song of the heavenly host that accompanied the herald angel, for they sang—"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men." It was this that helped, in the very temple of the Jews, to thrill with a transport of joy the aged Simeon as he held the infant Jesus in his arms and exclaimed, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten

the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." It was this that caused the Baptist to point Him out to His disciples in these words—"Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." It was this that led Christ Himself to say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" and that led Him to say to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

From these and other words of Jesus it is evident that this call was not to be confined to the Jews, but to extend to Gentiles. Yet from His ministry, in general, it did not appear as if he had come to call the Gentiles. By birth He chose to be a Jew. He chose to be born and brought up in the land of the Jews. It was in it that He spake as never man spake; and it was it that witnessed His mighty works. He did not, in the years of His ministry, go forth into the land of the Gentiles. To His own people, the Jews, almost exclusively, He preached the glad tidings of salvation. And when He sent forth His first disciples as missionaries to proclaim the gospel call, He strictly charged them, saying, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It would rather seem from His ministry and His instructions to His disciples that He had not come to call the Gentiles. However, it only *seemed;*

for notwithstanding His chiefly confining His preaching to the Jews, and the instructions He gave to His disciples, He intended His call to be addressed to the Gentiles,—only not yet. For wise reasons, reasons that seemed good in His sight, His call was not specially and prominently addressed to the Gentiles until He had finished the work which was given Him to do, by becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. But not long after He uttered these words on the cross—"It is finished," we find Him, on the eve of ascending from Mount Olivet, commissioning His disciples in very different words from those He had hitherto employed. These were now His instructions—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The disciples were not disobedient to His command, for they went forth as His ambassadors to almost all the then known kingdoms of the world, proclaiming His call alike to Jew and Gentile, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. And in every age since, He has had ambassadors who have considered it their meat and their drink to preach the Gospel to the heathen. A multitude which no man can number have obeyed His voice, "Preach the Gospel to every creature;" and at this present time there are more heralds proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation than at any former period of the world's history. This promise, then—"Thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not," has been, and is being signally fulfilled. So signally that its fulfilment is one of the most manifest proofs of the truth of God's Word. He that refuses to acknowledge this is wilfully blind.

The Gentiles' response to the call. "Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee." The apostles and disciples

of Christ, after His ascension, began preaching the Gospel, first to the Jews, but afterwards to the Gentiles. Many of the Gentiles in almost all the then known world, on hearing the gospel heralds proclaim the glad tidings, ran to Christ; in other words, believed on His name. So many of the Gentiles were believing at Antioch that the Jews became envious of the multitudes that flocked to hear Paul preach. This is the word Paul spake to these Jews—"It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts xiii. 46, 47). And in the following chapter we are told that, in Iconium, "a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Gentiles believed." The Acts of the Apostles is a history, and a glorious history it is, of the first-fruits of the Gentiles' response to the gospel call. There we read of Gentiles of various nations running to Christ. And since the days of the apostles till now the runners have never ceased. Sometimes many, and sometimes few, but always there have been some running for salvation to the Lord Jesus. Many nations that were formerly heathen are now professedly Christian. They have thrown their idols to the moles and to the bats, and have enrolled themselves under the banner of the Captain of salvation. Notably the two greatest nations in the world, Great Britain and America, whose ancestors were idolaters, now bear the Christian name, and are foremost among the nations in spreading

the glad tidings of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The number of Gentile Christians has ever been increasing, and at this day it is greater than at any former period of the world's history. It is true that idolatry and superstition and iniquity in various forms still prevail. Darkness to a great extent still covers the earth, and gross darkness the people. The children of Satan still outnumber the followers of Jesus. But this state of things will not continue, for the prediction of the prophet will yet be so fulfilled as to embrace the whole world.

That it will be so fulfilled there are many manifest signs in our day, so manifest that he that runneth may read them. The book in which Christ's call to the Gentiles is proclaimed has received a larger circulation than any other. No book has directly or indirectly exerted so benign an influence. No book has been translated into so many languages. It has been translated into hundreds of different tongues, so that even now almost all peoples can read and hear Christ call in their own language. The heralds of the cross are now giving forth Christ's call to the Gentile nations in almost every country of the globe. These heralds were never so numerous as now. Christ's people were never so deeply interested in the conversion of the heathen as in our day. For this millions of His true disciples are daily praying. Nor are they merely praying, but giving of their means to spread the Redeemer's cause. Never before were such large gifts laid on the gospel altar. One disciple is found, not leaving to be laid on the altar after his death, but in his lifetime placing the magnificent sum of half-a-million of pounds sterling on this altar. But, better still, the number of givers of both

little and large gifts for the cause of missions to the heathen outnumbers far that of any other period of the Church's history. When we look at these and other facts connected with the Bible, with Christ's people, and with the heathen world, can we doubt that the time is coming, may even soon come, when the prediction—"Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee," shall be so fulfilled that the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ, and that all nations shall be blessed in Him and call Him blessed?

The running to Christ denotes that sinners do not come reluctantly to Christ, as if they were compelled to come, or even indifferently, as if it did not matter much whether they came or not, but that they come eagerly, willingly, earnestly, with all their heart. They run as those did who ran from the avenger of blood to a city of refuge, or as the child runs from apprehended danger into the arms of a loving parent, or as the slave runs from the land of bondage to that of liberty, or as the runner of a race runs to the goal.

3. The cause of the Gentiles running to Christ. Although it is predicted in the text that nations that knew not Christ would run to Him, yet their not knowing Him was not the cause of their running. While totally ignorant of Him, they would remain at a distance from Him. They never would run blindfold or against their will, as if some irresistible force were pushing them from behind in spite of their blindness. Knowledge, not ignorance, causes sinners to run willingly and joyfully to the Messiah for life and salvation. They run because of their knowledge of the Lord, and of His righteous servant.

Because of the Lord thy God. While the Gentiles were worshippers of idols, it is clear they would never embrace the Messiah, "because of the Lord God." Before any of them would run to Christ, they must become convinced that all the idols of the heathen were false gods, and that the Lord was the only one living and true God. He that cometh to God, or to God by Christ, must believe that He is. If they come, they come because of the Lord thy God.

They come, "*for the Holy One of Israel.*" From nature and providence, Gentiles might have learned that the Lord is, and that He is almighty, all-wise, and good to all; but such knowledge is not sufficient of itself to induce sinners to embrace the Messiah. They need to know not only that He is the Lord, but also that He is the Holy One of Israel. They need to know Him not only as He is revealed in nature and in providence, but also as He is revealed in the Scriptures. It is in these we learn that He is holy and just, and yet merciful in forgiving sin. "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Such knowledge of God's character is necessary in order to induce sinners to run to Christ for salvation.

For He hath glorified Thee. Gentiles would run to Christ not only because "of the Lord thy God," and not only because of the "Holy One of Israel," but also because "He hath glorified thee." Not any one of these reasons, but the whole of them combined are the cause of the Gentiles running to Christ. The glory or honour conferred by the Father on Christ proved that He was the Messiah.

God glorified His Son in making Him the subject of the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. He honoured Him, in fulfilling in His person all that had been foretold of Him; honoured Him, in causing to dwell in Him while He tabernacled on earth the fulness of the Godhead bodily, so that those who had spiritual discernment beheld rays of the Divine glory radiating from Him. "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." God honoured Him in the days of His ministry with such a large measure of the Divine spirit as sustained and strengthened Him whilst He went about speaking as never man spake, working as never man worked, and thus showing forth His glory. God also signally honoured Him on various notable occasions. An angel was sent to announce His birth to the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains, and a choir of angels to celebrate the glad news in a song of praise. At His baptism the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon Him, and a voice from the excellent glory declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." During the season of His temptation angels were sent to succour Him. At His transfiguration He was honoured by Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, being sent to talk with Him, and by the same voice that honoured him at His baptism, again declaring, "This is my beloved Son." God honoured Him signally on many other occasions while on earth, and very notably when His life of self-sacrifice and suffering was drawing to a close. While He hung upon the cross, we are told the sun was darkened and the rocks rent. At His resurrection He was declared to be the Son of God with power. In these, and many other ways, God

glorified Christ; and because He glorified Him, Gentiles ran to Him.

In preaching both to Jews and Gentiles, the apostles were in the custom of dwelling much upon the glory that God had conferred on Christ. They made this the grand theme of their discourses. The glory or honour which had been conferred on Christ was the evidence that He was the Son of God and the Messiah. The great body of the Jews wilfully shut their eyes to this evidence, but many of the Gentiles opened theirs to behold it, and, admitting it, ran to Christ for salvation. They believed in His name, and became partakers of exceeding great and precious promises, even of those promises which in Him are yea, and in Him amen.

God is still honouring His Son. Every new believer brings an accession of glory to Christ. He is, and will be, glorified in His saints. They are the jewels that glitter on His diadem. It is their voices that celebrate His praises. They are His ambassadors in proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to the ends of the earth, and so in dependence on His grace striving to hasten the time when, "at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"SEEK THE LORD."

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."—ISAIAH lv. 6.

THE prophet has just been addressing the Messiah, but now turns abruptly from speaking to Him, and directs his words to all who will ever hear or read the message he delivers. Some are of opinion that this exhortation is exclusively for the Jews, as if Isaiah intended to say, "When the Lord calls the Gentiles, he will cease to call on the Jews; therefore, ye Jews, seek the Lord now, and ere that time come." Others are of opinion that the exhortation is for the Gentiles, and that the prophet, disclosing in the foregoing verse God's gracious purpose concerning them, urges them to take advantage of it by seeking the Lord. From the context, as well as from the tenor of the whole chapter, it appears to us that the text is unlimited in its application, and is meant alike for Jew and Gentile, even for every one upon whose ears its glad tidings fall. To you, whoever you are, is the word of this salvation sent—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

The connection between the fifth and sixth verses appears to us to be this: The prediction that God would call the Gentiles, and that the Gentiles would obey the call and run to the Messiah, would undoubtedly be fulfilled. Those only, however, would be found among the runners to the Messiah who personally sought the Lord. The prediction would be fulfilled, not in the case of all to whom the call was made, but in the case only of those who obeyed it. It is in vain for Jew or Gentile to build the hope of favour with God on His gracious purposes of mercy with respect to the nation to which He may belong. Any one belonging to a nation or family with which God has had gracious dealings, will not benefit, but add to his condemnation, if he refuses to accept the overtures of mercy; hence the force of these words—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

The world is full of seekers. Seekers bent on finding some good thing or another, which they expect when found will satisfy the desires of their longing hearts. That multitudes of finders, as well as multitudes who fail to find the objects of their pursuits, are bitterly disappointed there can be no doubt, for the continuous wail—"Who will show us any good," is heard almost everywhere. It is not because many, at least, of the objects sought are not lovely, or good, or excellent, or necessary in themselves, that there are such countless thousands of disappointed and unhappy people in the world, but because there is one supreme need of the soul that must be supplied before any one can be truly happy. That need is the Lord, and, until He is sought and found, the

soul will remain unsatisfied, no matter what else it may seek and find. The great question, "Who will show us any good?" is truly answered by these words—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." The Lord is *the* good and the *only good* that can truly satisfy the soul's desires. To find the Lord, in the sense of the text, is not merely to be conscious that He is in us and around us. There are many who say they find God in the works of His hands, who, nevertheless, are utterly destitute of true peace and lasting joy. How many, even of awakened sinners, have experienced distress, and not comfort, in the conscious presence of the Almighty. "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." To find God, in the sense of our text, is to find Him as the God of our salvation; to find Him as our reconciled Father; to find Him with the light of His countenance lifted up upon us. To find the Lord thus is synonymous with possessing His favour. "In thy favour is life, and thy loving-kindness is better than life." Dark, cold, dead, wretched, and miserable the soul must remain, until it is shone upon by the light of God's countenance. When this light beams upon a soul, it has found the Lord, and joyfully realising the greatness of its new possession, exclaims, "Abba Father." The Lord Himself, then, is the soul's great need, and no questions can be of greater importance than these—Where? how? and when? is the Lord to be sought and found. In this chapter let us attend to the first of these questions—*Where is the Lord to be found?*

1. The Lord is to be found in His Word. If sinners, when awakened to a sense of their need of the Lord, were

left in ignorance as to where He was to be found, they would certainly be of all men most miserable. Better not to have felt the need than, having felt it, not to be told where it could be supplied. With ever-increasing distress and terror, they would seek God here and there, but without finding Him. To the cry of their agonising souls, Oh! where shall we find Him? no response would ever be made. The God of nature and of providence, it is true, may be found in His works. The heavens and the earth show forth His glory. They sing of His might, and wisdom, and goodness, as well as of His severity; but none of them reveal the God the sinner needs. No note of love to the sinful and the fallen is ever heard in their song. In vain the sinner seeks in the book of nature for even the trace of the footsteps of a God of mercy. But we have not been left by God hopelessly to feel our way to Him in total darkness. He is to be found in His Word. He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures for the express purpose that He might be found of sinners. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation. "Search," says Christ, "the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

How much of the Scriptures are necessary to be searched before the Lord is found? This is a question that does not admit of a definite answer. Some have found the Lord after reading or hearing a very small portion of God's Word, while others who have read every word of it have failed to find Him. A poor beggar man, to whom we referred in a former chapter, found the Lord before he had finished the reading of the first three chapters of

John's Gospel. He had never read any other part of the Bible. It was the word *whosoever* that was mainly instrumental in leading him to find the Lord, and in Him eternal life. We have formerly referred to the case of a poor cripple, a notoriously wicked man, who, when he became anxious about his soul, thought that praying and reading the Bible would save him. In this state of mind he read every word of the Bible, and had nearly finished the reading of it a second time without finding the Lord. It was on coming the second time to the words, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," that he found Him whom he had been so long seeking. The question, "How much of the Word of God is it necessary to search and study in order to find the Lord?" can only be answered by this reply—"Seek, and ye shall find." All we need to know about our lost and sinful state, about the character of God, and the way of salvation through Christ, is to be found in the Bible. If we do not find the Lord there, it will not be the fault of the Book, but will arise from our own faulty seeking. In the Bible millions have already found the Lord, and there you too, if you have not yet found Him, shall find Him, if you will only truly seek; for the Lord is found of all those who seek Him. And surely, if anywhere, He will be found in that Book in which, as we have already said, He has revealed Himself for the very purpose that He might be found.

2. The Lord is to be found where the Gospel is proclaimed. This does not imply any deficiency in the Bible as a place where the Lord is to be found, for the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The faithful servants of the Lord will ever honour the Word by making

it the grand instrument by which they will seek to lead sinners to the Lord. God has honoured the Bible by making it the means whereby many, through its instrumentality alone, without the aid of preachers, have sought and found Him. But He has also honoured the preaching of the Gospel, by making it the means whereby countless thousands have been led to seek and find Him.

God is to be found in the sanctuary. The house of God is a place not only where He is to be worshipped and His people edified and comforted; it is also a place where the message of salvation is to be proclaimed; so that of every church meeting-place, where the Gospel is faithfully held forth, it shall be said, "This man and that man was born in her"—in other words, there found the Lord.

But the faithful preaching of the Word is not confined to sanctuaries, for wherever and whenever His true servants declare His name, there and then the Lord is to be found. No fewer than three thousand found Him when Peter preached his great pentecostal discourse. These three thousand may be said to be the first-fruits of the preaching of the Gospel, for from that day to this God has signally honoured the preaching of the Word. Through this means more, we believe, have found the Lord than through any other.

3. The Lord is to be found at a throne of grace. Not a few of those who have found the Lord, found Him on their knees. Seeking and calling are closely linked together in the text, so much so that calling may be said to be seeking. Many have found God at a throne of grace. Not that the Word of God, or the preaching of the Gospel, failed to lead them to find God, for it was either the one

or the other of these, or both combined, that sent them to their knees.

We have conversed with some professing Christians who tell us that until a sinner is sure that he believes in Jesus his prayers are unavailing, are even an abomination to the Lord, and that none should be told to pray until they have believed. The prayers of the hypocrite, we know, are an abomination to the Lord, and even the sincere prayers of those who seek to merit salvation by them are useless for this end; but we do not believe that the prayers of awakened sinners, seeking thereby to find the Lord, are either an abomination to Him, or of no avail. He that heareth the ravens when they cry unto Him for food will certainly not turn a deaf ear to the cry of anxious souls earnestly desiring to be saved in His own way. If there is one more than another, it is surely such an awakened anxious one who is invited by God's own Word to call upon the Lord. Many poor trembling sinners, seeking to find the Lord, have gone down on their knees, and called earnestly upon the Lord, and have arisen with the consciousness that they had found Him whom they sought, and in Him peace to their troubled consciences and life to their souls.

If you have not yet found the Lord, seek Him where those who have already found Him sought Him, and you too will find Him. Seek Him in the Bible. Seek Him in the sanctuary. Seek Him at a throne of grace; and if you truly seek Him there you shall not fail to find Him, and in finding Him, you will esteem your new-found possession as your chief treasure, and henceforth sing of Him, "Thou my sure portion art alone."

CHAPTER XIX.

"SEEK THE LORD."

OUR aim in the last chapter was to answer the question, *Where* is the Lord to be sought and found? In this our desire is to answer the question, *How is the Lord to be sought and found?*

1. Earnestly. The seeking and the calling of the text clearly imply earnestness. They have an earnest ring about them. Were we to deprive them of this quality, we should take the very soul out of them. There are thousands who do not succeed in this life, not through lack of talents, but of earnestness; while others, less gifted than themselves, surpass them, in virtue of this great moving power—a power the lack of which has prevented untold thousands from finding the Lord. Some, who are all a-blaze with earnestness in the affairs of the present life, go about their souls' business with a coolness and listlessness as if earnestness were no factor in its concerns. It is a great mistake, for the spiritual life can neither be begun nor continued without it. If the Lord is to be found, and, when found, to be kept, there must be earnestness on the part alike of the seekers and the keepers.

A little girl, who had lost her mother in a great city, was borne high on the shoulders of one of the tallest men

through the surging crowds. The child, by the motion of its body, urged him on, while her eyes, strained to their very uttermost, scanned the countenances of the women who mixed in the crowd, as if she could have devoured them, while her voice, in tones of the most urgent entreaty, which those who heard could never forget, ever and anon cried out, "Mother! mother!" None who beheld the motions of this child's body, or observed her searching eyes, or listened to her voice, would ever again require to be told what earnestness was. If sinners really felt the want of the Lord as she felt the want of her mother, and sought Him earnestly as she sought her, they would not fail to find.

If you complain that, notwithstanding your church-going and reading of the Bible and attending on the means of grace, you have not yet found the Lord, may it not be because you have not sought Him with sufficient earnestness, with the earnestness becoming the transcendent greatness of the boon sought, and its indispensable necessity to the soul's life and true happiness?

2. Perseveringly. There are some men who may be said to work by fits and starts. Now they are earnestly labouring at their calling, as if with set purpose, and by-and-by they are lying on their oars, as if they had nothing to do, and did not care what became of themselves or those dependent on them. Not a few of such men bring bankruptcy upon themselves and ruin upon their families, while if they had only continued to work with earnestness, they would have attained to an honourable position in their profession, and have earned at least a competency of the good things of this life. Some, it is true, somehow get

along in this life without great earnestness and perseverance, although with these they might have become kings among their fellows, instead of mere ordinary men; but none, without earnestness and perseverance, will ever find the Lord, and, having found Him, continue to enjoy the light of His countenance. Fits and starts of earnestness will not avail in any circumstances whatever in the spiritual life. Some, on the occasion of great bereavements, or great bodily trouble, or great worldly loss, or other great trials, are led for a time apparently to seek the Lord earnestly, and to call upon Him urgently, but lapse into their wonted listlessness, as soon as they are delivered out of their extremity of suffering or trial. It is not such seekers and callers who find the Lord, but those who, God helping them, resolve to seek till they find. Do not complain that you have not found the Lord, even although at times apparently you have been seeking Him earnestly, and calling upon Him urgently, if you have not persevered in seeking and calling. It is those who persevere unto the end who find the Lord, and are saved.

3. Hopefully. Hope is a great factor in the affairs of this world. Some by it have apparently, in severe illness, been brought back to life from the very gates of death, while others, for lack of it, have succumbed to their malady. Some students have kept hope alive in their bosoms, notwithstanding failures and difficulties they had to contend with, and which would have extinguished hope in almost all other students; by keeping it burning they have surmounted their failures and difficulties, and ultimately achieved great and deserved eminence, so that literally they were saved by hope. Many a shopkeeper,

through opposition or other adverse circumstances, has lost hope, and, in consequence, had to give up business, while others, whose circumstances were even worse than theirs, have been sustained by hope, and ultimately surmounted all their difficulties and prospered in the world. By hope they were saved, saved from bankruptcy. Hope is also a great element in the spiritual life. Some are so conscious of the greatness of their guilt, of their proneness to evil, of their natural dislike to what is pure and lovely, that even should they turn their thoughts sometimes to the concerns of their souls, they soon lose hope. There may be hope for others, they say, less sinful or prone to evil than they are, but for them there is no hope. So they argue ; and hope, if ever it arise in their hearts, is soon extinguished. Some, who have apparently really tried to believe and be saved, though not finding salvation and peace so soon as they sought it, or where they expected to find it, lose hope and abandon the search for the Lord, while others continue hopefully to seek for and call on the Lord, and are at last rewarded by finding Him. They are saved by hope. Hope will not always avail in the affairs of this life, for there are many circumstances and difficulties which it may not be able to overcome ; but there are no circumstances or difficulties in the way of a sinner finding God, except those raised by himself, for there are none of God's making, and there are none in the Bible—none that need extinguish hope in the bosom of any true seeker after God and His favour. On the contrary, there is everything in the Word of God calculated to kindle hope and keep it burning in the sinner's bosom. The greatest transgressor is warranted

by the whole Word of God to hope in the mercy of the Lord. Do not despair, O trembling sinner! however guilty and vile you may be. Hope thou in the mercy of God. His voice it is that is now saying to you, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

4. Believingly. Faith is no doubt closely allied to hope. They are twin sisters, and sometimes so like that it is not easy to distinguish the one from the other. Faith is even a stronger principle than hope. In hope, at least in the affairs of this life, there is always an element of uncertainty. We hope, and our hope according to its strength, or the ground on which it rests, sustains us. Faith, however, discards all uncertainty. It is full and complete trust that we shall succeed in this or that. We do not for a moment doubt our power or ability, or the machinery which by them we have set agoing and keep moving to attain a certain end. This is faith. And, not to speak of religion, it has wrought wonders, if not miracles, in the world. Faith discovered a new world, the law of gravitation, the circulation of the blood; it wrote "Paradise Lost" and other immortal books, besides discovering and doing many other great things. This great principle enters as an element into our seeking for and calling on the Lord. We must have faith in order that our seeking and calling be not in vain, but lead on to finding the Lord. Faith will greatly increase our earnestness, sustain our perseverance, and brighten our hope, and nothing will so soon put an end to all these as the want of it. In multitudes of cases in the concerns of this world, faith is operative and has wought wonders,

although it had no absolutely sure ground to rest on. Those, however, who seek the Lord and call upon Him, have an absolutely sure basis to rest their faith on—viz., the Word of Him who cannot lie. "Seek, and ye shall find."

A child has been lost. A great forest is near at hand in which children have sometimes been lost and never found, and it is hoped she has strayed into its depths. We say hoped, for the alternatives are that she has fallen over an adjoining cliff into the depths of the ocean, or been stolen by a gang of gipsies. Her parents, with nearly all the neighbours of the district, go into the forest in search of the lost one. They are animated by hope, and search earnestly; but by-and-by they begin to lose hope, their earnestness grows less, and the search is just about to be given up, when one of their number comes across a little shawl, which, on being shown to the child's mother, is soon wet with tears of joy. It is her daughter's. Hope revives, and faith is born. The finding of the lost one is no longer a matter of hope, but of faith. The search is not given up. "My daughter," the believing mother exclaims, "shall be found." At last a faint cry is heard. Faith now grows strong, and causes the searchers to run, to leap, to fly hither and thither, and soon the lost child is clasped close to a mother's loving bosom.

Let us bless God that there is no uncertainty about the Lord being to be found in the Bible, or the sanctuary, or at a throne of grace. Seekers will find Him in these places, for He is there for the express purpose of being found. It is not merely hope, but faith which should animate those who are seeking the Lord where He is sure to be found. The child's shawl was found, and its faint

cry was heard in the forest; the one gave birth to faith in the seekers, and the other sustained it; but God Himself may be seen in the Bible—there, too, His voice may be heard, and heard inviting sinners to seek Him, and to call on Him. Seek the Lord, then, believingly, with full confidence that you will find Him. If you do not truly believe that He is to be found, it is no wonder that you have never found Him, or that your hope is faint and your exertions in seeking Him have been so feeble, or that you have so often left off inquiring for the Lord. If your soul is lost, it will not be because the Lord was not to be found, but because you have failed to seek Him. If the seekers for the lost child, after finding its shawl and hearing its plaintive cry, had abandoned the search, no language could be too strong in which to condemn their folly and their want of faith; but how much greater is the folly and unreasonableness of those who, having the Bible in their possession, on every page of which there are tokens that the Lord is to be found in it, and in whose pages His voice may be heard crying unto them, and inviting them to seek Him, yet refuse to seek Him, or, having commenced to seek, have abandoned the search!

CHAPTER XX.

"SEEK THE LORD."

THE questions, where? and how? the Lord is to be sought and found, we have tried to answer in the two last chapters. In this one, let us attend to the question, "*When is the Lord to be sought and found?*" The text says, *while* He may be found, *while* He is near.

This word *While* speaks to us very emphatically, perhaps more so than any other word in this chapter of Isaiah. It occurs twice in the text, and seems to court our attention, and to do what it can to prevent us from passing it by without complying with its monition. Yet there is not another word in the whole chapter, or in the whole Bible, to which less heed is given. More gospel hearers have probably been lost in consequence of not giving heed to this word and its synonyms than through all other causes whatever. "Ho," we have seen, cries with a loud voice, so as to arouse sinners to a sense of their lost condition; and not a few who appear to hear it, and also to admit that the means of salvation to which it points alone can save them from perishing, resolve by-and-by to repair to the life-giving waters,—only not now, in consequence of one or more of endless excuses

for delay; whereas, yielding to the bidding of this word "While," they would not perish, but have everlasting life. "Wherefore?" as well as "Ho," speaks, though loudly, yet winsomely, to those whom it addresses, and appeals to their reason. Yet many who are not inclined to quarrel with it, and readily admit that they are spending their money for that which is not bread, find obstacles in the way that cannot just at once be removed; or there is something or another on which they are now spending their money, or for the acquisition of which they are now spending their time and labour, that cannot at the present moment be conveniently relinquished. They resolve, however, some time—a time which they themselves are quite sure will come—to yield to its advice. This is the way in which "Ho," and "Wherefore?" and other words of warning, as well as words of sweet and tender entreaty, such as "Come," "Incline your ear," are too often treated by gospel hearers. It is impossible, however, so to treat "While," and so delaying hearers and readers of the Bible give it no quarter whatever. Yet it is the very word they need. If we are speaking to any such—no matter what profession you are making, or what promises you are making to yourself to attend to the warnings and invitations of the Word of God—we solemnly remind you that unless you give due heed to this word "While," the probability is that these warnings will never have effect on you, nor will these invitations be accepted by you. Some think because they are members of a church there is not much danger of their not at some time or other believing and being saved. Are they not, Sabbath after Sabbath, being reminded of the way of salvation, so that when the

time that suits them to believe and be saved comes, it will be easy for them, knowing the way so well, to embrace the overtures of mercy? Or should they be suddenly laid on a sick and dying bed, will not their dear pastors or other Christian friends pray with them and for them, and so that they shall find Jesus and in Him life eternal? In this way they give heed to the suggestions of Satan or their own deceitful hearts, and turn a deaf ear to God's voice, which says "While." All the time they thus treat God's Word, their hearts are undergoing a hardening process, rendering it less and less likely that they will ever give heed to "While," and be converted and be saved. Ye who are thus at ease in Zion, could our voice reach you in tones of thunder, it would be this word "While" it would ring in your ears. When is *while?* It is *now.* Now the Lord may be found, and now He is near, and to you He may never be to be found or near again. If it is quite certain that He will be found of you, or be near to save you, to-morrow or next year, or on a sick or dying bed, or in eternity, then this word "While" twice tells an untruth in our text. But this is impossible, for it is the word of Him who cannot lie. There are seasons, no doubt, when it appears the Lord is more easily to be found, and is nearer than at other times, —such seasons as those of great sickness, or pain, or peril, or bereavement, or worldly loss, and other trials. On such occasions God sometimes seems to come very near, and to knock very loud at the door of the heart, and it is well if He is truly sought when He is thus near, and to be so readily found. But alas! how many are there who seemingly seek Him in their extremity, but who are no

sooner delivered from the evils that afflicted them than they forget alike the Lord and their vows, showing that they did not, after all, truly seek Him. The longer that either professing or unprofessing Christians give no proper heed to this warning word "While," it is the more unlikely they will ever believe in Jesus. A hardening process, as we have said, is ever going on in their hearts, rendering them more and more disposed to resist alike the warnings and invitations of the Gospel.

Look at that young man; a few years ago, though not then a decided Christian, yet he did not shun the sanctuary, and liked rather than otherwise to hear a good sermon. He also read the Bible with a certain amount of interest, and conducted himself at family worship with, at least, outward propriety. To him emphatically the Word of God was saying—"Seek ye the Lord *while* he may be found, call ye upon him *while* he is near." By-and-by, he began to be sceptical about some parts of God's Word, and was not afraid to call in question much that his minister said, especially when he urged with unusual earnestness the great concerns of the soul. Family worship became irksome to him. He began to avoid it when he could. He ventured now to criticise his father's prayers to his brothers and sisters. It did, at length, appear as if the Lord was not now to be found, and was not now near to save; and this, not because the Lord, if sought, would not be found, but because the young man, by his treatment of his religious privileges, had so hardened his heart, that at last it had become unimpressionable to the voice of God. He had persistently thrust God away from him. He would not have Him near.

The Lord seems very near to the young. The season of youth is peculiarly favourable for finding God. "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." Yet how many of the young neglect to seek the Lord while He is to be found, and to call upon Him while He is near. They do not all act, however, like this young man. They only put off seeking till they are older. How very many, but for this *putting off*, would have found the Lord in the season of youth, had they sought Him, but never found Him, having cast off all thoughts about the salvation of their souls, on growing up to be men and women. In their youth the Lord was very near to them; if they had called upon Him, He would have listened to their cry for mercy; had they sought Him they would have found Him, and found in Him the God of their salvation. Some professing Christians, members of churches, who have not truly believed in Jesus, but who are always intending, some time or other, to do so before they die, are not slow to say of this or that person, What a pity it is that he should have died unprepared, and should have ruined his soul for the sake of money, or drink, or vice, or something else. Of course, they themselves would never have been guilty of like folly; yet all the while they know that there is a something that cleaves to themselves, which they are not willing to be separated from, and yet which they will not permit to drag them down to hell. They will not act like those persons they have been condemning for their folly, but, long before they die, will sever themselves from this something, and then truly seek and find salvation, and give themselves wholly to the Lord. It comes, however,

to the same thing, for it is just as likely that they themselves, like those they profess to pity, will die, only intending, but never truly seeking the Lord while He may be found, or calling upon Him while He is near.

There are some things which most men admit should be attended to at once, yet which many leave undone. They are always intending to give attention to them, but live their whole lives intending, but never performing. How many, for example, live and die, intending to give heed to the injunction, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live," the consequence of such neglect often being to inflict great wrong and suffering on those they leave behind. A party of ten mourners were returning home on the top of a stage-coach, after attending the funeral of a relative in the country. One of them remarked to the friend who sat next to him, "What a wretched condition that family is left in. The widow is already at variance with her eldest son. Brothers and sisters are at deadly strife with one another. The lawyers will get nearly the whole of what the poor man has left; and all this strife and agony in consequence of Mr. White not having made a will." "It is really," replied the other, "a most distressing case, and he is certainly much to be blamed." The whole of the friends were agreed as to Mr. White's great neglect. At length one of them ventured to say to the gentleman who began the conversation, "Of course, Mr. Black, you have made your will long ago?" "Oh no, I have not done so yet, but I intend to do so very soon. I would never leave my family in the same plight as the Whites." The same question was put in turn to the whole ten gentlemen, when it was found that not one of them had made his will,

so that they were all equally guilty of the neglect for which they were blaming the friend they had just buried.

See that you are not blaming others for a greater neglect than these men were guilty of, even the greatest of all neglects—that of not seeking the Lord while He may be found, and not calling upon Him while He is near. And see that you do not blame others, as these men did their friend, for neglecting the very thing of which you yourself are guilty. If you are only intending to seek the Lord at some future time, the probability is that you will die without carrying your intention into execution. Give heed, then, we entreat you, to these words—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." As already remarked, "while" is now. You cannot be certain that the precious season when the Lord is to be found, and when He is near to hear the cry of sinners, will last for you another day or hour. To-day —now—is the season to seek and find the Lord. To-day, if ye will hear His voice—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

A man, whose wife was on her death-bed, went one evening to hear a great revival preacher who was speaking in the open air. His object was to see the man of God at the close of his address, and ask him to come and see his wife. The man took up his place on the very outskirts of the great crowd that had gathered around the preacher, for he felt ashamed to be seen at such a meeting, being the keeper of a very low and notorious public-house. He was impressed greatly by the sermon, felt convinced that the business he was engaged in was a sinful one, and was leading sinners to hell. Tremblingly he went up at the

close of the service, and asked the Lord's servant to come and see his dying wife, but continued, "I am afraid, sir, when you hear where she is (a room at the back of his shop), you won't come." "Oh yes, I'll go wherever it is." On the way the publican, referring to his business, said, "I intend, sir, to give it up at the term." "There," was the reply, "are no *terms* with God." Not another word could the distressed man draw from the servant of the Lord than this—"There are no terms with God." A less experienced servant of God would likely have entered into conversation with this anxious sinner, but he knew by the grace of God that this was *the* word in season that was needed; and to the earnest entreaties about salvation which this convicted one made to him, his only reply was, "There are no terms with God." These words, by God's blessing, were the means of the conversion of this, perhaps, the greatest sinner in the town—at least, in his own estimation and in that of many others.

These words, "There are no terms with God," are a true commentary on the words of our text—"While he may be found;" "While he is near." It is the word, if you are still putting off the great business of your salvation to a future day, that you, above all others, need addressed to you. Oh! do not forget "There are no terms with God." "To-day, if you will hear his voice," "seek ye the Lord *while* he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

CHAPTER XXI.

"HE WILL ABUNDANTLY PARDON."

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."—ISAIAH lv. 7.

IN a single word or two the Bible frequently expresses a great deal. No book in the world excels it in this respect. For example, how suggestive and full of meaning are these two names, the "wicked" and the "unrighteous," given in the Word of God to all unconverted men, and especially when considered in connection with "way," which is associated with the one, and "thoughts" with the other. This single word "way" graphically denotes the whole behaviour, conduct, conversation, course of life, or words and actions of all who have not returned to the Lord, while "thoughts," better perhaps than any other word, denotes their secret wishes, designs, plans, and purposes. Their *ways* are open to the inspection of men, but their thoughts, except those of them they choose to reveal, are seen by God only. The "thoughts" and "ways" of a sinner are inseparably associated together, like cause and effect, or the under-

ground hidden fountain and the streams that issue from it, or the roots of a tree and the fruit it yields. His "thoughts" are evil, and his "ways" which issue from them, are like them, only evil and that continually. Out of the heart, the home of the thoughts, proceed all the evil words and wicked acts that dishonour God and afflict humanity.

Why is mercy made dependent on the wicked forsaking his "way" and the unrighteous man his "thoughts?" Are not forgiveness and all other blessings that flow from the mercy of God in Christ received by sinners, not on account of their own works, but by faith alone? Are not sinners in this very chapter (Isa. lv.) again and again invited to come and receive and partake of the blessings of salvation, without money and without price? They are; and yet the offer of these blessings and true repentance, as in the text, are inseparably associated. The connection between these two, which is clearly stated in the text, is implied in all the preceding verses of the chapter. Every thirsty sinner (ver. 1) is invited to come to the spiritual waters, that drinking of them he may slake that deep inward thirst of his soul, which all the streams of this world have failed to quench; but it is certain he will never come until he loathes these polluted springs and ceases to drink of their waters. He is earnestly entreated (ver. 2) to eat that which is good, the very good needed by his soul in order to meeten and nourish it for heavenly glory; and although by grace he can have it simply for the taking, yet it will not be taken by him until he ceases to spend his money for that which is not bread. He is entreated in the most winsome words (ver. 3) to hear, and

promised life if he but incline his ear; yet it is plain that ceasing to listen to all counsel that would close his ear to God's voice is involved in obeying this gracious invitation; while the "life" it promises can only be enjoyed by its subjects dying unto sin, and the covenant God promises to make with the *hearer* and *comer* can only be made with him on his terminating all engagements which he knows to be inconsistent with it. The acceptance of Christ (ver. 4) as "Witness, "Leader," and "Commander" involves ceasing to listen to all witnesses, following all leaders, and obeying all commanders who are opposed to Him and His kingdom. "Nations" (ver. 5), it is said, "shall run unto thee," but this prophecy will not be fulfilled until the heathen, who are the runners referred to, have turned their backs on their false gods, and their faces towards the Messiah. Sinners (ver. 6) are exhorted to seek the Lord and to call upon Him, but they will never give heed to this exhortation until they abandon the search for a portion to their souls in aught else than in the Lord. True repentance, then, to which we are urged in the seventh verse of our chapter, in order that we may obtain mercy and forgiveness, is clearly implied in all the preceding verses of the chapter, as inseparably associated with the blessings they freely offer to poor and needy sinners.

The nature of true repentance is forcibly taught in the text, by urging three things on the sinner, if he would truly repent.

1. Let the wicked forsake his way. If mercy were shown by God to sinners who refused to abandon their sinful ways, it is obvious that such a procedure would not only encourage them to practise iniquity, but mercy shown to

such transgressors of God's laws would not be mercy but misery to themselves and to others. Sinners, then, need not expect mercy and forgiveness from God unless they forsake their wicked ways. It will readily be conceded that it would be in vain for the murderer while he continued to murder, or the adulterer while he continued a fornicator, or the thief while he continued to steal, or the drunkard while he continued to quaff the intoxicating cup, or any other obstinate transgressor of God's law while he continued practising wickedness, to ask mercy and obtain forgiveness of God. But it is not only gross sins, but all sins, larger and smaller in all their varieties of hue, which, while loved and practised, rise up as barriers to the mercy of God. Evil speaking of others, backbiting, pride, vanity, self-conceit, self-righteousness, greediness, and all other violations of God's law whatever, cherished and indulged in, rise up as impassable barriers between the sinner and the mercy of God. Forgiveness will be extended to no sinner while he refuses to forsake his wicked ways. Let no sinner deceive himself by thinking that his sins are of such a mild and harmless character that an exception to the general rule will be made in his case. The text admits of no exceptions. While you cleave to your sins, you put forgiveness away from you.

2. Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts. Not only must the sinner forsake his wicked ways, he must also forsake his unrighteous thoughts, if he would have the Lord to have mercy upon him. Without forsaking his unrighteous thoughts, a sinner may forsake those wicked ways for which he has been chiefly noted. One who has been a drunkard may abstain from intoxicating drink.

One who has been an adulterer may become outwardly chaste. One who has been in the habit of taking God's name in vain may cease from swearing. Or one who has been a thief may become an honest man; but if there has not been an inward and radical change, so that his unrighteous thoughts are forsaken, these thoughts while they remain will force new channels for themselves in the sinner's life. The evil thoughts of the heart, if not forsaken, cannot be effectually dammed up, for although they may be restrained in this or that direction, they will find new outlets in others. While the fountain of thoughts in the heart remains impure, the streams that flow from them, however much they may vary at times, will be evil, only evil, and that continually.

3. Let the sinner return to the Lord. Returning to the Lord is the natural sequel to the wicked forsaking his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. It was these ways and these thoughts that all his life have been leading him away from God, and when by the grace of God he is led to forsake them, he, at the same time, as a matter of course, returns to the Lord. "Let him return to the Lord" may, then, be said to be included in the twofold precept, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," for what else is returning to the Lord but forsaking these? The sinner's bondage to them has held him back from the Lord, but as soon as the chains of his slavery are broken and he set at liberty, the emancipated one runs, cannot help running, into the arms of his Heavenly Father, that are ever outstretched to receive the truly penitent and returning sinner. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord."

Can the wicked and the unrighteous man forsake his ways and his thoughts of himself? We never said he could. He cannot of himself, but by the grace of God he may, and that grace has never been, and never will be, withheld from those who sincerely desire to forsake their wicked ways and their evil thoughts and return to the Lord. Yet in the case of every man who truly repents, notwithstanding whatever help he may have received from God's servants, or God's Word, or the Holy Spirit, it is he himself who repents. It is he himself who forsakes his wicked ways and his unrighteous thoughts and returns to the Lord. These are things which no one, not even the Holy Spirit, can do for him.

Must a man in thought and deed become perfectly holy before God has mercy upon him? The text does not imply this. If it did, then we would utterly despair of obtaining forgiveness from God. It implies, however, that we are truly sorry for our sins, and are sincerely desirous to forsake them, and to return to the Lord. Were we to attempt to return to the Lord, cleaving to this or to that known sin, and resolving not to forsake it, be the sin what it may, instead of hearing the voice of mercy saying, "Come," we should hear the angry voice of God saying, "Depart."

William Burns was preaching one evening in the open air to a vast multitude. He had just finished, when a man, the same we spoke of in the preceding chapter, from the outskirts of the great crowd, came timidly up to him at the close of the service, and said, "O sir! will you come and see my dying wife?" Burns consented; but the man immediately said, "Oh! I am afraid when you know

where she is, you won't come." "I will go wherever she is," he replied. The man then tremblingly told him that he was the keeper of the lowest public-house in one of the most wretched districts of the town. "It does not matter," said the missionary; "come away." As they went, the man, looking up in the face of God's servant, said earnestly, "O sir! I am going to give it up at the *term*." Burns replied, "There are no *terms* with God." However much the poor trembling publican tried to get Burns to converse with him about the state of his soul and the way of salvation, he was unable to draw another word from him than these—"There are no *terms* with God." The shop was at last reached. They passed through it in order to reach the chamber of death. After a little conversation with the dying woman, the servant of the Lord engaged in prayer, and while he was praying the publican left the room, and soon a loud noise was heard, something like a rapid succession of determined knocks with a great hammer. Was this not a most unseemly noise to make on such a solemn occasion as this? Is the man mad? No. When Burns reached the street, he beheld the wreck of the publican's sign-board strewn in splinters upon the pavement. The business was given up for good and all. The man had in earnest turned his back on his low public-house, and returned to the Lord, who had mercy upon him, and unto our God, who abundantly pardoned all his sins. Nothing transpired in his after-life to discredit the reality of his conversion.

Remember, ye who have not yet found peace in believing, that unless, like this man, you forsake your sins, God will not have mercy upon you. Your sins may not be the

keeping a low public-house, or doing anything else in your eyes so gross or vulgar, or destructive alike of the bodies and souls of men; yet, whatever be the nature of your sin, if cherished and cleaved to, it bars your way to the Saviour as really as the public-house did to its keeper. Jesus came to save sinners, not *in* but *from* their sins.

There is a vessel on fire at sea, and she is sinking in the deep waters. The life-boat is alongside, but if any choose to remain on board of the sinking ship rather than leap into the boat, they must inevitably perish; and so will your soul if you refuse to forsake your sins and fall into the outstretched arms of Jesus, who invites you to trust your soul to Him. If sinners could be saved by Jesus, and at the same time be allowed to cherish and practise known sin, many that now keep at a distance from Him would run to Him for salvation. But there is no such salvation as this offered to sinners in the Bible. Mercy and forgiveness are promised to those only who forsake their wicked ways and their unrighteous thoughts. If you would be saved, remember that now is the accepted time, for there are *no terms* with God. Choose this day whether you will cleave to your sins and have the wrath of God abiding on you; or, forsaking them, return to the Lord and obtain mercy and forgiveness.

The words of our text are a great encouragement to sinners to repent and return to the Lord.

They are encouraged by the certainty of obtaining mercy. Great exertions are often made by persons to obtain mercy from man, even when it is very doubtful if they shall succeed. If sinners were as anxious to obtain mercy from God as these persons are to get it from their fellow-men,

they would be found earnestly imploring God to have mercy upon them, even although it were doubtful whether they would succeed. But there is no doubt whatever, for it is not said the Lord *may* have mercy on the returning prodigal, but the Lord *will* have mercy upon him. The prodigal son, when he became sorrowful for having sinned against his father, resolved to return to him, although he did not know to a certainty that mercy awaited him. It was, at the best, only a peradventure his father would have mercy upon him that prompted his returning steps, whereas the penitent sinner, who forsakes his wicked ways and his unrighteous thoughts, has God's own sure word of promise that he will be received with open arms, and for Jesus' sake pressed to the Father's bosom—a bosom that beats with stronger paternal love to every returning penitent than the combined love of all other parents.

Many, when convinced of sin, and alarmed for its penal consequences, are kept back from returning to God by imagining that while there may be mercy for other classes of sinners, there can be none for them. Our text should dispel all such fears, for it makes no exceptions whatever. There is not a single sinner, however many his sins, or however aggravated they may be, to whom its glad tidings are not addressed. The good news is for the wicked and the unrighteous. Is this your character, ye trembling ones? Then to you is the word of this salvation sent. Your sins, however many, and however great, if truly repented of, cannot come between you and the mercy of God. Your sins may reach to the clouds, but His mercy reacheth even to the heavens (Ps. xxxvi. 5). "Let the wicked," then, "forsake his way, and the unrighteous man

his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him."

Can anything possibly be added to induce sinners to return unto the Lord? Yes, for sinners are further encouraged to return unto the Lord by the promise, "He will abundantly pardon," or "multiply to pardon." His mercy is infinite, so that one's sins can never be too many, nor of too deep a dye, to be forgiven. Like the sand on the sea-shore, or the hairs on our heads, our sins may be innumerable, but they can never outnumber the pardons which the mercy of God has at its command, and is ever ready to bestow upon every penitent sinner. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts"—be these ways and thoughts ever so many—"and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The mercy of God has in store a pardon for every sin.

Although pardon is the only blessing here mentioned as flowing from the mercy of God, yet such pardon as this includes blessings without number,—yea, all that the penitent, returning sinner needs for his present welfare and future glory. The poor prodigal son never expected such full, abundant, complete pardon as that offered in our text to repenting sinners. He, at the best, only expected to be partially forgiven, and only to the extent of receiving a place among his father's hired servants; but his father's forgiveness far exceeded his expectations, for he so abundantly and completely forgave him as to restore him to all the blessings and privileges of sonship. In the text, pardon full and complete is the only blessing mentioned as flowing from the mercy of God; but, as in the

case of the prodigal son, such pardon includes all other needed blessings. The completely forgiven sinner becomes a child of God, and an heir of glory, and, as such, entitled to all the blessings and privileges of the sons of God.

Sinners are further encouraged to return to the Lord from the circumstance that the prophet, and those who had already returned to the Lord, could claim God as their own, and say of Him, "Our God." They knew experimentally that the Lord their God was a God of mercy. They had tasted that the Lord was gracious, and were anxious that others should experience the blessedness of being forgiven. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to *our* God, for he will abundantly pardon."

CHAPTER XXII.

"MY THOUGHTS NOT YOUR THOUGHTS."

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."—ISAIAH lv. 8, 9.

DOES "For"—the link-word that begins our text—connect the thoughts and ways of God, and what is said about them in the eighth and ninth verses, with the way and thoughts of the ungodly mentioned at the beginning of the seventh verse, or with the subject of forgiveness mentioned at the end of the verse? or does it connect all that goes before it with all that follows after it in the chapter? Let us glance at each of these connections, and while we do so assume that each is the true one.

1. "For" seems very simply and naturally to connect the thoughts and ways of God with those of the ungodly. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; *for* my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." Some may think that this cannot be the connection intended, as it would seem rather to discourage than encourage

sinners to return to the Lord, owing to its being impossible for them ever to have "ways" and "thoughts" similar to those of God, seeing that the difference between theirs and His is stated in the text to be infinite. This, however, if the contrast has respect to moral purity—which it must have, if "for" connects the thoughts and ways of God with those of the ungodly (ver. 7)—is not the fair and obvious inference to be drawn from the comparison. The inference suggested to us is this,—The thoughts and ways of God differ so infinitely from, are so utterly opposed to, and so irreconcilable with, those of unconverted men, that no partial change of their thoughts, nor mere amendment of their ways, will constitute true repentance or a genuine returning to God. They must utterly abandon or forsake their ways and thoughts, if they would have God to have mercy upon them and forgive their sins. This cannot mean that they must be transformed into perfectly holy beings all at once, for, if it meant this, no man could repent; but it means that they really and truly resolve, in God's strength, to forsake all their wicked ways and all their unrighteous thoughts, and that they do not intend henceforth to follow any of the one or cherish any of the other. If, before they thus forsook these wicked ways and these unrighteous thoughts, God said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," surely, after they have forsaken them, He cannot continue to say this, but rather there must be a sense in which He will now say, My thoughts are your thoughts, and My ways are your ways. If the sinner forsake his ways and thoughts, is it not implied that the new ways and thoughts that

succeed the old are those of God, or are of the same nature or character? It was these old ways and thoughts that separated God and the sinner, but, as soon as they are forsaken for ways and thoughts like those of God, God and the sinner are no longer separated; for, as like draws to like, so soon as the sinner has sincerely complied with the command—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,"—then, according to the law of assimilation, he returns to God, who has mercy upon him, and forgives all his sins.

It is a great mistake to suppose that any one can recommend himself to the mercy of God by a partial change of his thoughts, some amendment of his ways, or even a great change in both, while he harbours thoughts which he knows to be ungodly, cherishes desires which he knows to be sinful, and follows practices which he knows to be wicked; for, while he is unwilling to forsake every one of his unrighteous thoughts, and every one of his wicked ways, the door of mercy will be shut against him.

Who, then, can be saved? The true penitent; for although, after he has returned to the Lord, he has still to battle with the evil ways and the evil thoughts of the old man, he is no longer under their dominion. They are utterly foreign to the ways and thoughts which spring from the new seed or principle that is implanted in his soul when he returns to the Lord. The thoughts and ways of the old man he hates, and, by the grace of God, continually strives against them; and not in vain, for he is enabled daily to put off the old man with his affections and lusts, and to put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. Thus the

new ways and thoughts supersede the old, and will ultimately and entirely overcome them. He has, notwithstanding what remains in him of the old man, and notwithstanding the sins and shortcomings in his life which these have occasioned, sincerely complied with God's invitation—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." And the Lord, according to His promise, has had mercy upon him, and abundantly pardoned all his sins.

2. Consider "for" as connecting the thoughts and ways of God, not with the ways and thoughts of the ungodly mentioned at the beginning of verse 7, but with the subject of forgiveness mentioned at the end of that verse. Although the connection we have already considered seems the most natural, yet there are so many passages of Scripture bearing on the infinite mercy of God in forgiving sin that it is difficult to resist their united force. And so we may look favourably on the view that "for" connects the thoughts and ways of God with the subject of pardon. These words—"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him" (Ps. ciii. 11), taken in connection with their context, are almost similar in import to the latter part of the 7th verse of our chapter (Isa. lv.) when united to the 8th and 9th verses. Our Saviour's words in answer to Peter's question bear the same meaning—"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. xviii. 22). If this, then, is the connection which "for" was intended to form, the contrast drawn in the 8th and

9th verses will have respect, not to moral purity—which it must have if the connection we have already considered is the true one—but to the infinite difference between God's disposition to forgive and that of man's. The infinite difference between God's disposition to forgive and that of man's disposition to forgive will appear if if we take into consideration—

(1.) The number and character of the sins which He forgives. We may forgive each other a few offences, but when these are often repeated it is not so easy to forgive, and when they are repeated from day to day, and from year to year, as if they would never come to an end, it becomes almost impossible to forgive. At all events, one knows if he had sinned as frequently against his neighbour as he has against the Lord, it would be in vain for him to expect to be forgiven; and also, if any one had so often sinned against him, that he would not be disposed to forgive. Men under conviction of sin are apt to judge God's disposition to forgive by their own, and so to conclude that it is impossible for God to forgive; and as long as they so judge, they cannot but despond. If, however, they will turn their ear to God's Word, they will hear it telling them that what is impossible with man is possible with God. For the mercy of God is not limited like that of man's, but unlimited. However numerous the sins of the ungodly man may be—and they are as countless as the hairs of his head, or as the sand on the sea-shore—they can never place him beyond the reach of Divine mercy, which can multiply pardons so as to meet any number of transgressions. Innumerable sins may dry up human, but they cannot dry up Divine,

compassion. The mercy of man has limits, but the mercy of God knows none. The thoughts and ways of God about mercy and its outcome—forgiveness—are as high above the thoughts and ways of man as the heavens are higher than the earth. No man's sins can ever outnumber the pardons that the God of mercy is ever ready and willing to bestow upon the returning penitent.

Let none, then, ever despair, be their sins ever so numerous. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

(2.) The character of the sins which God offers to forgive. Men will sometimes readily forgive certain kinds of offences, but other kinds on no account whatever. Some offences they count mortal or unpardonable. The awakened sinner is sometimes more concerned about the nature or aggravations of his sins than their number, and judging of God's disposition by man's, and knowing that he is guilty of far greater and more heinous sins against God than what one man can be guilty of against another, he is led to look upon his sins as of so vile a character, or of so deep a dye, as to completely shut him out from the mercy of God. So he despairs of mercy, and will continue to despair, until he looks away from the limited mercy in man to the boundless compassion that moves the Divine bosom, and to which our text, and many more in the Word of God, directs our attention. When the sinner does this, despair will give place to hope.

Some men are noted for their forgiving disposition. So much is this the case that they are sometimes looked upon as if they were encouraging evil-doers. Be this as it may, there are men so incorrigibly wicked that even these remarkably merciful men refuse to forgive. Such hardened sinners, by their multiplied and aggravated offences, at length exceed the limits which even the most merciful men can be induced to forgive. The door of mercy, which these hardened offenders have found so often open, is at last, and for ever, shut against them. The compassion of even the best and most forgiving of men has thus limits, but the mercy of our God is infinite. His compassion can never be dried up. It is unfailing, and ever flowing for all—even the chief of sinners. The sinner may be guilty of every crime under heaven; he may be such a monster of iniquity that the laws of no country would leave a single loophole of escape for him from the most condign punishment, and that even the worst of ordinary criminals, if they had the power, would not suffer him to live; and yet, if even such a sinner—a man so vile that he could not find a single individual in the whole globe to have mercy on him—were to turn from his sin to God in truth, he would find God willing and ready to pardon him—nay, beseeching and entreating him to accept of forgiveness—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "For my thoughts" and ways about mercy and the forgiveness of sin "are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my

ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

The compassion of parents for their children is of all kinds of human compassion the most difficult to dry up. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Yet even the mercy of the most loving and most forgiving of parents is not unlimited. The long continued and ever increasing, aggravated misconduct of children has been known at last to dry up the fountain of compassion in the bosom of even the most tender and loving of parents. Sons, who have frequently returned from their folly and wickedness to their father's house, and been forgiven and welcomed, have at last returned to find that the door was barred against them, and that for them now there was forgiveness no more. The misconduct, too, of daughters who were once the very apple of a parent's eye, and whose faults it would have been thought could never have altogether quenched a mother's love, has yet in the end led to the same result. Over the door of the once happy home of these erring ones have been written these words—"You enter here no more,"—words which might make even angels weep. There may have been no alternative, but let us thank God there are no such words over the portals of our Heavenly Father's house. The vilest and the guiltiest sinner in the whole world, on returning to Him, will be welcomed to His bosom, and hereafter to His home in heaven. The sins of some transgressors may close the way between them and those who can have mercy on them here, may close the way even to a parent's heart; but, be their sins ever so great, they cannot close the way, sprinkled by a Saviour's blood, to the heart of

our Father in heaven. It is His own voice that is now calling on sinners, and without a single exception, in these words—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

(3.) The infinite difference between God's disposition and man's disposition to forgive will appear, if we consider not only the number and nature of the sins He offers to pardon, but also His manner of forgiving.

God forgives freely. No price is asked by Him for the pardon He offers to bestow. Forgiveness, no doubt, implies that the forgiven have turned their backs on their sins, but they are visited by no penalty, nor are they taken bound to render any services whatever, as the price of the pardon that is granted them. It would not be mercy if this were the case. Man sometimes forgives freely, but even the most forgiving of men cannot always wisely and safely, as society is constituted, so forgive some violations of the law, even if they were so disposed. Many men will not freely forgive at all, even when they might do so without in the least compromising the good of society. Some men strive to drive a hard bargain with those who need their forgiveness, and sometimes so clog the pardons they offer with conditions that the boon, if boon it may be called, is spurned; while not a few who have been shut up to accept of pardon on such hard terms have experienced that their lot afterwards was not much, if any, better than if they had remained unforgiven. In many cases in which it is necessary to temper judgment with mercy, men are often

too apt to mingle much judgment with little mercy. God, however, always forgives freely. The sinner never need refuse pardon offered by God because of an apprehension that He pardons like such men, by imposing hard conditions, and such as will afterwards keep him in continual misery and bondage. God pardons freely.

Not to speak of such hard-hearted men, there are others of even very forgiving disposition whose consciences will not allow them, however much they may be inclined, to forgive freely certain evil-doers,—the good of these persons themselves, as well as that of society, demanding that, in order to be forgiven, they must be bound by conditions. It is quite foreign, then, to many men to forgive freely; and others who are disposed to forgive freely cannot always do so on account of various circumstances. But what is impossible with man is possible with God, for when He forgives, He always forgives freely. This, to not a few awakened sinners, seems too good news to be true; for, judging of God's forgiving disposition by man's, they have great difficulty in believing it possible that He can pardon their sins freely, and hence they imagine that they must do something, or in some way or other pay a price in order to obtain forgiveness from God. And it is not till they stop judging of God's forgiving disposition by man's that they are brought to see that the pardon offered by God to them is really free,—a pardon that any price however great could not buy, and which, if received by the sinner, must be received by him without money and without price.

God forgives without encouraging sin. Men of an easy disposition not infrequently freely forgive, for they cannot

be troubled imposing conditions on those they forgive, and in so acting they sometimes do great injury not only to those they forgive but also to others. The forgiven, instead of mending their ways, grow more hardened, on account of the easy manner in which they have been pardoned, encouraging them to commit the same sins over again, if not against those who have forgiven them, against other persons. Parents often foolishly forgive their children freely, when they ought first to have punished them, and also bound them to certain conditions for the future. Thus it will be seen that while in certain cases men might, if they were willing, wisely and safely pardon freely, there are cases in which they would not be justified in so acting, for thereby they would be encouraging evil-doers. It is different with Him whose thoughts and designs and arrangements for forgiving sin are as high above those of men as the heavens are higher than the earth. He offers unconditional pardon to every penitent and returning sinner, be he ever so vile and guilty. By other methods than bringing the forgiven under certain obligations, He secures that the pardoned shall henceforth cease to do evil and learn to do well. As the sinner at the first knows that he must forsake his sins if he would obtain mercy, so after he has returned to God, he knows and feels that the continuance of the favour of God depends on his continuing to depart from iniquity. Not in his own strength, but in dependence on promised aid, he puts "off the old man with his deeds," and puts "on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." He does all this, however, not as the price he pays for pardon, but out of gratitude for so great

a boon, and as the outcome of the new life that begins to animate his soul, as soon as he experiences the forgiving mercy of God. The life of holiness he now lives is not the cause of God's having had mercy on him, but the fruit of it. The sinner must not stumble at the freeness of the pardon God offers him. He must not think of man's thoughts and ways about forgiving, and their results. He must not say, Man could not freely forgive his fellow-man certain offences if often repeated, without encouraging him in his evil ways; therefore God cannot freely forgive me. He must cease altogether judging of God by man, and consider that what is impossible with men is possible with Him whose thoughts and ways about forgiving sin are as high above ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. Anxious, trembling sinner, willing to forsake your sin, God is now holding out to you a free pardon. Accept the proffered boon, and leave the interests of justice and holiness to Him. They are safe in His keeping.

When God forgives He forgets. Some men, referring to those who have injured them, say, I can forgive, but I cannot forget. Forgiven persons often suffer keenly under the impression that their offences, though professedly forgiven, are not forgotten. They imagine they see in the looks of the persons who forgave them indications that their faults have not been banished, but treasured up in memory. Ever and anon they fancy they see these indications, and are so deeply pained in consequence that they groan inwardly, and almost wish they had not accepted forgiveness. Man, no doubt, often forgives and forgets, but even men of a most forgiving disposition are not always able to forgive and forget. In spite of the good

intentions of some men of forgiving dispositions, in this respect, they are at times found looking and speaking and even acting as if they were remembering the injuries they had received from those whom they had pardoned. There is a limit not only to the number and character of sins that men will forgive, but also to those which, even if they forgive, they will or can forget. The penitent sinner need not be discouraged in returning to God, and accepting of forgiveness on the ground that his sins, though pardoned, will be remembered by the Lord. If he judges of God's thoughts and ways of forgiving transgressors by man's he might be discouraged, but not if he considers that there is an infinite difference between them. God so completely and abundantly pardons as to forget the sins that have been forgiven, or rather—which comes to the same thing—to act as if this were the case. On the great day of annual atonement, two goats were brought as a combined sin-offering for Israel. One of these was slain and its blood sprinkled on and before the mercy-seat, and thus it made atonement for the people. On account of its shed blood their transgressions for the past year were forgiven. The people, of course, did not see the blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat, but God had so directed the services of that great day, that they had a visible symbol set before their eyes of the complete blotting out of their sins, so as that they would be remembered no more. This visible symbol was the already forgiven or atoned-for sins being put upon the other—the live or scapegoat—which, thus laden, was led into the wilderness, where it and its burden of sins were for ever lost; so that if these sins were ever sought for, they should not be found. This was

typical of God's completely forgiving our sins, for Jesus' sake. However many, and however great our sins may be, when He forgives He also forgets—"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." The pardoned sinner, as he gazes up into the face of his Heavenly Father, will never perceive the slightest trace of the remembrance of former sins flitting across the Divine countenance. Man could never so forget innumerable and aggravated offences committed against him by his fellow-men, but it is well for us that, in this respect, God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways,—"For," says God, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." However far short we must ever come of perfectly imitating God in forgiving and forgetting sin, we should ever be aiming to follow His example. Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

God delighteth to forgive. "He delighteth in mercy." How few, comparatively, there are who take pleasure in forgiving many and great offences! How many there are who never would have granted the forgiveness they extended to erring ones, had it not been dragged out of them. There are men of a different disposition, who take real pleasure in forgiving those who have offended them, but even they are not able always so to forgive. There is a limit to even the delight that the most forgiving of men take in pardoning those who have sinned against them; but God's delight in pardoning is infinite. However many, and however aggravated the sins of a true penitent may have been, they cannot prevent, not only God forgiv-

ing him, but also His delight in forgiving him. Mercy has well been called God's darling attribute. When spoken of in connection or contrast with other of God's perfections, the very highest place is ever assigned to it. "The truth of God reacheth to the clouds, but his mercy is great above the heavens" (Ps. cviii. 4). "Thy judgments," says the psalmist, "are a great deep. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains. Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds;" but mark what is said about His mercy—"Thy mercy is in the heavens" (Ps. xxxvi. 5, 6). What great encouragement to an anxious sinner is the consideration that God delighteth in mercy. His thoughts and ways in this respect are as high above ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. In this chapter of Isaiah the many and winsome and beseeching invitations He gives to sinners to come to Him for pardon, and all other needed spiritual blessings, show that He is not only willing and ready to forgive, but delighteth in mercy. "Let the wicked," then, "forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

3. Consider "for" as connecting all that goes before it in the chapter with all that follows after it in the chapter, and not merely or exclusively with the 7th verse. If the 8th and 9th verses had been entirely dissociated from the remainder of the chapter, we would not have considered

"for" as having this wide connection, but these two verses are not isolated, but by the "for" of the 10th verse intimately connected with the last four verses of the chapter. It follows from this that the "for" of the 8th verse connects what it refers to, be that what it may, not merely with the 8th and 9th verses, but with the whole of the last half of the chapter. And as what is said in the last half of the chapter about the Word of God and its glorious results cannot merely have reference to this or that in the 7th verse, but obviously to the other subjects embraced in the first half of the chapter, we are led to regard the "for" of the 8th verse as a great link-word, connecting all that goes before it in the first half of the chapter, with all that follows after it in the last half of the chapter. Looking upon "for" as uniting the two halves of the chapter, it follows that not only of what is said about mercy and pardon in the 7th verse, but also about the Gentiles in the 5th verse, about the Messiah in the 4th verse, about spiritual life and the everlasting covenant in the 3rd verse, and about the offer of salvation to every sinner, and buying without money and without price, and eating that which is good, in the 1st and 2nd verses, God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

It is well for us that the thoughts and ways of God are as high above ours as the heavens are above the earth, whether "for" merely connects this precious truth with the subject of forgiveness mentioned in the 7th verse, or with the whole subject of salvation which forms the

grand theme of our chapter. But for this precious truth we could not but have despaired of ever being blessed with that abundant pardon we stand in need of. Now we may well say, if we be willing to repent and forsake our sins, we will hope in the mercy of our God. God will delight Himself in us if we so do—"The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."



CHAPTER XXIII.

"MY WORD SHALL NOT RETURN VOID."

"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."—ISAIAH lv. 10, 11.

TWO kingdoms lie close together in our text. Nature occupies one of its verses, and grace the other. Widely as these differ, they have many points of resemblance, and this is not to be wondered at, seeing that the same Divine Being is the author of each, and is ever moving and working everywhere in both. He is as efficacious in the kingdom of grace as He is in the kingdom of nature, and the object of our text is to show and illustrate that this is the case. For this purpose it draws a comparison, and gives us its application. We have the comparison in the tenth verse, and the application in the eleventh verse.

1. The comparison, or the efficacy of God in nature. The water, as rain and snow that descends from above, ascendeth thither again. From pond, and lake, and sea, or wherever it may collect, it is drawn up as vapour,

perfectly sweet and unsullied, to the heavens, having left behind all the impurity and bitterness that mingled with it while visiting our earth. The clouds into which it is again formed sail away in the aërial sea in the direction in which they are wanted, in order, as before, to pour their watery treasure upon a dry and thirsty world.

Snow and rain serve many useful purposes, but the chief one is to moisten the earth and make it bring forth and bud. The word rendered "bud" signifies to germinate, or sprout, or cause to grow. By this phrase is meant the whole process of vegetable growth, both what takes place below and above the ground: the quickening of the seed, and, by-and-by, first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. The earth is thus watered, to cause it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater. Other agencies, both human and Divine, combine, along with the rain and the snow, to produce germination and growth, but it is plain that man would sow and plant, and the sun shine in vain were the showers of heaven withheld.

If, for a few years to come, there were only a sufficiency of the fruits of the earth brought forth yearly for man's yearly need, the human family would soon come to want, and man would soon disappear altogether from the earth; for, in succeeding years, there would no longer be fields waving with golden harvests, but everywhere barren land. Nature is not thus niggardly in her gifts, but wonderfully prolific, for the earth, watered by refreshing showers, brings forth abundantly not only bread for the eater, but, over and above this, seed for future crops. From the beginning of the world till now, the rain and the snow have never

failed in thus carrying out the purpose for which they were commissioned to visit a needy earth. The promise of the Lord has been fulfilled in every one of the bygone years of the world's history, and will continue to be fulfilled during the years that have still to run, even till time shall be no more: "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest shall not cease" (Gen. viii. 22).

2. The application, or the efficacy of God in the kingdom of grace. "*For* as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: *so* shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The Word of God, like the rain and the snow, comes from above, but it not merely comes from heaven, or drops from inanimate clouds, it goeth forth out of the very mouth of God. It is true, it is spoken by His servants, but it either first proceeded out of His own mouth, or out of the mouths of those who were moved by the Holy Spirit, so that really it is ever God who is speaking. This shows the Divine origin and mighty power of the Word. It comes, not from mere inanimate clouds, but out of the very mouth of the ever living and Almighty Jehovah. Surely, then, if mere rain and snow return not to heaven, without first accomplishing the end for which they were sent to the world, much more will the word that goeth forth out of the mouth of God not return unto Him void—that is, without effecting the great designs for which it is sent to a perishing world.

"It shall accomplish," saith the Divine Sender, "that which I please, and it shall prosper in (or rather, prosperously carry into effect) the thing whereto I sent it." As the rain and the snow do not fall merely as a matter of course, or because the clouds cannot help dissolving themselves, but descend on a mission to the earth, and do not return to heaven again, as we have seen, without having carried it into effect, so surely is God's Word not spoken in the air, as if it had no purpose to serve; but goeth forth out of the mouth of Jehovah, charged with Divine energy, so that it shall not, and cannot, return to Him void—that is, without accomplishing the grand mission on which it is sent.

The certainty of God's Word being fulfilled is the chief theme of our text. What is said about the Word of God in the text is true of the Word of God in general, but it is of the Word of God as spoken in this chapter of Isaiah that our text specially speaks. The certainty of God's Word being fulfilled relates to all that goes before our text in the chapter, and likewise to all that follows after it.

The text is related to the 7th and 8th verses. In the first of these the encouragement held out to the ungodly to repent is that God will abundantly pardon, and the encouragement in the other is that He is infinitely merciful. If it is foreign to man's nature to forgive numerous and aggravated offences, it is altogether different with Him who delighteth in mercy, for His thoughts about forgiveness are as high above those of men as the heavens are higher than the earth. The subject is continued in our text; the "for" it begins with shows this. In this we have

another encouragement to repentance. Notwithstanding the other encouragements, many sinners are apt to doubt God's willingness to forgive them. If one says—and cannot somehow help saying—"Will God indeed pardon such a sinner as I?" the text answers, Yes. God's promise to forgive is absolutely certain to be fulfilled. Those who by their wilful unbelief reject the overtures of mercy will not render the promise ineffectual, or cause it to return to God void; for if they will not, others will believe and be saved, and in the case of such the promise of forgiveness shall surely be fulfilled—"It will accomplish that which He pleaseth, and prosperously carry into effect their salvation, which is *the* thing whereto He hath sent it."

The word that goeth forth out of the mouth of the Lord has respect not only to repenting sinners, but also to everything else He says or predicts in the chapter. For example, what He predicts about the heathen (ver. 5); about the Messiah (ver. 4); about hearing, and coming, and spiritual life, and the everlasting covenant (ver. 3); about buying without money, and the sufficiency of gospel blessings to satisfy the soul's thirst, and cause it to delight in the abundant nourishment which they supply, and about the joyful sound of salvation for every one (vers. 1, 2)—all these will certainly be fulfilled. Not one word or promise with respect to any of these glad tidings can possibly fail.

Not only shall God's word, as spoken in this chapter, come to pass, but it is now being fulfilled. His word has not returned, nor ever will return, unto Him void. It has been, still is, and will continue accomplishing that which He pleaseth, and prosperously carrying into effect the thing

whereto He sent it. Its glorious mission will not cease until "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea," and all men be blessed in Him, and call Him blessed. This is the thing whereto He sent it.

Salvation being the grand theme of the chapter from the beginning to the end, it is that with which the Word of God in our text is specially related. To save, or convert and sanctify, sinners is the thing whereto the Word is sent. This is its grand mission, and it will not fail to accomplish it. *As* the rain and the snow moisten the ground, and cause the seed sown in it to germinate and bring forth, *so* the Word of God operates on the heart of man. It effects in the heart of man a change analogous to that which is effected in the ground by the rain and the snow. The conversion and the sanctification of the soul answers to the germination and bringing forth of the earth. The Word of God so melts and softens and vivifies the heart as to effect conversion. The Holy Spirit is doubtless the grand agent in this blessed work, but we should ever bear in mind that He effects His gracious design by the Word of God. *It* converteth the soul. As the rain and the snow not only cause the seed in the ground to die and germinate but also to grow, so God's Word not only converts, or begins a new life in the soul, but carries on what it begins. It not only converts, but also sanctifies—"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." The child born in conversion grows, it may be gradually, but surely, unto the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus. Or the seed, quickened in conversation, springs up—first the tender, fresh, and lovely green blade

of early piety; then the ear, the increased knowledge, and wisdom, and strength, and courage, and abounding usefulness which become those who are not mere babes, but men in Christ Jesus; then the full corn in the ear, the peculiar sweetness, and calmness, and heavenly-mindedness, and Christlikeness that betoken a soul fast ripening for the angel reapers. Or the race for glory that is begun in conversion is carried on in sanctification. The converted are exhorted to run with patience the race set before them, looking to Jesus, and never to halt until they have reached the goal, and laid hold on the prize, even the crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The Word of God, charged with Divine efficacy, never fails in accomplising these gracious designs. It both converts and sanctifies. This work of salvation is the thing it prosperously carries into effect. This is that whereto God sends it. It is His messenger sent on this errand, and it never returns to Him without effecting the purpose for which He sends it. Its effects on the heart of man are as certain as those of the rain and snow on the ground. As these have never failed, but every year water the earth, and cause it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so the Word of God has never ceased, and never will cease, to convert sinners, and to sanctify and build up believers in their most holy faith. It has been doing this in the past, is doing it now, and will continue to do it, to the end of the gospel era. The rain and the snow would be without effect if no seed were sown in the ground, but the word that goeth forth out of the mouth of God is not only that which softens, refreshes, and vivifies the heart, but is itself also the seed

that is quickened by these gracious influences, and from which spring the plants of holiness and trees of righteousness which abound in the garden of the Lord.

The Word of God, then, is *as* efficacious in the kingdom of grace *as* the rain and the snow are in the kingdom of nature. This, as we have already seen, is a great encouragement to sinners to seek and call upon the Lord, and to forsake their sins; for He has promised to abundantly pardon them, and this word or promise of His must be accomplished; it shall not return unto Him void. If sinners, then, comply with the invitations, they shall as certainly be forgiven as the rain and the snow are certain to cause the earth to bring forth and bud. The efficacy of God's Word is also a great encouragement to believers to persevere in working out their salvation. Without the certainty of God's Word being fulfilled, believers would soon despair of being able to grow in the Divine life, owing to the strength of sin still within them, and to the many evil influences by which they are surrounded, and to their frequent shortcomings and backslidings. It is well that their salvation does not depend on themselves, but on God's Word—that Word which will as surely accomplish their sanctification as the rain and the snow render the ground fertile. It will accomplish that which He pleases. Among the things that please Him, the sanctification of His people is pre-eminent, and His Word, through His grace, will not fail prosperously to carry it into effect. "It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure." "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

The efficacy of God's Word is a great encouragement to

all who are engaged in spreading the Gospel. But for the impossibility of God's Word returning unto Him void, they would often despair of reaping any fruit from their labours. The text holds out to them the certainty that, if they sow in faith, they shall in due season reap. To many who hear the Word it proves, in consequence of their unbelief, a savour of death unto death; but to others who give heed to it, it is a savour of life unto life. Some who preach the Gospel faithfully may not see any indications of the efficacy of the Word in those to whom they make it known, but it may for all this be operating at the very time in the hearts of not a few of them, and in others, of those to whom he apparently ministers in vain, it may long after be quickened. The scatterer of the good seed of the kingdom may rest confident that he is not sowing in vain, nor ever shall. The Word of the Lord shall be effectual to the salvation of sinners. This is the mission on which it is sent, and this it will and must carry into effect. For this is the thing whereto He has sent it, and His Word shall not return unto Him void. As surely as the rain and the snow never descend from heaven in vain, neither will the Word of God, that goeth forth out of His mouth and the mouth of His servants, fail of success. Weary not, then, ye gospel heralds, and sowers of the good seed—the Word of God—for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"JOY AND PEACE."

"For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."—ISAIAH lv. 12.

THE felicity of those who have been delivered from slavery, captivity, or deep affliction of one kind or another, is frequently set forth in the Scriptures by representing all nature as jubliant with joy. Israel's escape from Pharaoh and Egyptian bondage is celebrated in highly poetical language—"The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills like lambs?" Since then nature has often been invited to mingle its congratulations with the people of God:—"Sing, O heavens; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." Nature in our text responds to the invitation by rejoicing with those who do rejoice. As she witnesses the people whose happiness is predicted going forth with joy and being led

forth with peace, she gives emphatic expression to her congratulations. The mountains and the hills shout aloud their praises, and the trees respond to the joyful noise by clapping their hands. The mountains and the hills singing, and all the trees clapping hands (branches), is expressive of very great joy. To clap the hands is elsewhere in Scripture employed in this sense (Ps. xcviii. 8).

To whom does the "ye" of our text refer? Who are the people greatly blessed? 1. Are they the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon after a long period of captivity? That at least during some time of their exile the bitterness of their banishment from their beloved land was deeply felt by the Israelites cannot be doubted—

> "By Babel's streams we sat and wept,
> When Sion we thought on;
> In midst thereof we hanged our harps,
> The willow trees upon."

But when the hour of deliverance at last struck, the bitterness of their condition had been greatly mitigated, and dwelling in a strange land had become at least tolerable to the great mass of the Jews, for only about a seventh part of them availed themselves of the liberty to return, the rest being content to remain in the land of their captivity, and make it the land of their adoption. Some, no doubt—perhaps the most of those who did return—were in an ecstasy when the news of the permission to return greeted their ears—"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The

Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." Whether the homeward journey was accompanied with signal manifestations of joy we cannot tell, for of this journey there is no record whatever. No such joy, however, as that indicated in the text and in the above passage appears to have been experienced by those who returned after reaching their own land, if we except the rejoicing at the dedication of the second temple. Soon after their arrival, they quarrelled with the Samaritans, and ever after the two nations were at variance, and were the occasion of great dispeace and trouble to each other. It is clear, then, even though there may be some allusion in the text to the return of the Jews from exile, that a greater deliverance is spoken of, and one whose subjects would experience peace and joy greater far than were ever realised by those who returned from Babylon. In keeping with the character of the whole chapter, there can be no doubt that the prophet has mainly in view a great spiritual deliverance.

2. Is it the heathen converts who first embraced the Gospel (Acts xiii. 48; 1 Thess. i. 6), and the joy they experienced, that are the theme of the prediction? The Gentiles who believed the Gospel were indeed filled with joy and peace. The Ethiopian eunuch had no sooner believed in Jesus than he went out with joy and was led forth with peace. "He went," we are told, "on his way rejoicing." And so it was with all who believed—"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord." "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word of God in much affliction, with *joy* of the Holy Ghost." Yet we do not

believe, although the Gentiles are referred to in our chapter (ver. 5), that the prophet has them only or mainly in view.

3. Does the prophet refer by "ye" to all of every age, whether Jew or Gentile, that would repent of their sins and by faith return to the Lord? We believe he does. The joyful sound of this chapter is for all on whose ears it falls. It calls on all, without any exception whatever —"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Are not these happy tidings for all? Are they not the tidings that Jesus commanded His disciples to publish abroad throughout the whole earth? "Go, preach the gospel to every creature." Every one, then, who believes, or inclines the ear, and comes to God, or repents and returns unto the Lord, shall not only be abundantly pardoned, but shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace. This is what God has promised, and this word of His grace shall be fulfilled as certainly as the rain and the snow fulfil the end for which they are sent into the world—"My word shall not return unto me void."

Among other things which please God and which His Word accomplishes is this, that all penitent and believing sinners shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace. The wicked are like the troubled sea; they are never at rest. The thraldom of Satan, and their own lusts and passions, never suffer them to be truly at peace. It is not till the chains with which these have fettered them are

broken that they can escape from this slavery and bondage. The only way of escape is by repentance and faith. When one truly repents and believes, the chains that bound him to sin and Satan are snapt asunder; he is set free, and then goes on his way rejoicing. Joy that is unspeakable and full of glory now springs up in his soul, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding now keeps his heart and mind through Christ Jesus. Truly all believers have the promise fulfilled—"Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace." Were all the mountains and hills, not figuratively, but actually, to break forth into shouts of praise, and all the trees to clap their hands, it would but feebly express the deep peace and great joy of all true believers.

There is a sense in which nature does appear to wear a more joyous aspect to some than to others. A runaway slave, the Rev. Josiah Hansen, the famous Uncle Tom, on his feet first touching the Canada shore, acted as if the very dust of the ground was rejoicingly welcoming him, for, falling down in transports of joy, he hugged and kissed the very earth. How beautiful all nature around him that day must have seemed! To the true convert nature cannot but appear to wear a brighter aspect than before. Now that he has found peace and joy in believing, the mountains and the hills, the trees and the flowers all sing to him a new song. They all seem to rejoice with him. Of these, and all the other works of his hands, he is now able to say, "My Father made them all;" and he is able, in a way that no others are, to look up from nature unto nature's God. If the emancipated slave hugged and kissed the very dust of the land of freedom, and danced for very

joy, how much more should the poor slave of sin and Satan when set at liberty by Jesus Christ, realise that not this or that part of the world, but that the whole earth, and all nature are rejoicing and welcoming him; for he can go nowhere in the wide world where he is not spiritually free, and where the manifold works of his Heavenly Father are not ready to welcome and rejoice with him. We doubt whether those who see no greater loveliness and hear no more melodious sound in nature than before they professed faith in Christ have been truly converted. How can those who have been emancipated from the thraldom of sin and Satan, and delivered from hell, and been put on the road to heaven and glory, but, like the Ethiopian eunuch, go on their way rejoicing!

It is true, while here, the peace and joy of the child of God are not perfect. Sin and Satan, although they shall never again have dominion over him, are still permitted to trouble and tempt him. They are the occasion oftentimes of disturbing his peace, of lessening, but never of drying up, the fountain of joy that has its seat in his heart. Though at times he is sorrowful, yet he is always rejoicing. In Divine strength he is engaged in a holy warfare against his spiritual enemies; and as he fights them, they are so weakened and overcome that he is enabled to go from strength to strength, and from victory to victory. As he thus advances, his peace and joy are ever abounding more and more; and he is cheered on by the prospect of final and complete victory, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

Sin and Satan, as well as other spiritual foes which the child of God has to contend with here, accompany him

through his whole earthly pilgrimage,—yea, follow him to the very gates of paradise; but, blessed be God, they cannot enter along with him. There he bids them all an eternal adieu, and, as soon as he enters, he is safe from all spiritual foes, for ever safe and for ever happy. Nothing of evil will now mingle with his cup of bliss. Perfect joy is the portion of all heaven's bright inhabitants. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Then shall the promise of our text and all similar promises be completely fulfilled. For "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

CHAPTER XXV.

"INSTEAD OF THE THORN THE FIR."

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."—ISAIAH lv. 13.

THOSE who repent of their sins, and by faith return to the Lord, will not only be abundantly pardoned (ver. 7), and have great joy and peace in believing (ver. 12), but will also (ver. 13) undergo a great moral change, a change so great as to be likened to that of a wilderness being transformed into a very paradise—"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."

This gracious change is among the things which please God, and which His Word will as certainly accomplish as the rain and snow fulfil the mission for which they are sent into the world.

A criminal may be pardoned, and go out from prison with joy, and be led home with peace, without ever experiencing any moral change to the better. At heart he may be as much a murderer, or a thief, or a sinner of some kind, as ever he was, and as ready as ever, on opportunity occurring, to return to his former wicked ways. It is altogether different with those who are

abundantly pardoned by God, and who experience joy and peace in believing. Although pardon and sanctification may be distinguished and spoken of separately, they can never be disjoined. They are inseparable, for whom God pardons or justifies He also sanctifies. All who repent and believe undergo a complete change of heart and life. This great and gracious change is very beautifully described in the words we are considering: "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."

Some are of opinion that the "cypress" is intended by the word rendered "fir tree," and "nettle" by the one rendered "brier." But the prophet's meaning would not be affected by a change in either case; for it is evident that "thorns," and "briers," and "firs," and "myrtles" are used in a general, though spiritual, sense; the two first as representing the meanest and most destructive of shrubs, and the two last, the most beautiful, fragrant, and useful of trees. Sinners, by nature and practice, are like these mean, useless, and hurtful thorns and thistles: their thoughts are evil and their ways are wicked, and it is not till they forsake these thoughts and these ways, and return by faith to the Lord, that they will be abundantly pardoned by Him who delighteth in mercy. Forgiveness, however, is only a part of salvation. Another part of it is, the springing up in the soul of other and better thoughts, in place of those which have been forsaken, and, in the life, of other and better ways than those which have been abandoned. When this takes place, then instead of the thorn comes up the fir tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle tree.

Zaccheus, the chief of the publicans, before he saw and believed in Jesus, had been a thorn in the sides of many, but how changed from the happy moment that his eyes beheld the Saviour: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." In his case how speedily sprang up, instead of the thorn, the fir tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle tree. What a contrast between Saul the persecutor and Paul the apostle! Those who remembered how he persecuted the saints even to the death, and who were afterwards cheered and comforted by him, not only when he was present with them, but also through his loving epistles when he was absent, must have been sensible of the very great and gracious change which he had undergone. "God is my record," he says to the Philippians, "how greatly I long after you all, in the bowels of Jesus Christ." It is not only such as Zaccheus and Paul that undergo the spiritual change to the better, but every sinner who truly repents and returns to the Lord (compare verses 11 and 12 with verse 13). When the drunkard becomes sober, when the fornicator becomes chaste, when the swearer becomes one who fears to take God's name in vain, when the carnal become spiritual, when the worldly become heavenly-minded, when the vain and proud become humble, meek, and lowly, when the quarrelsome become peacemakers, when the selfish become benevolent, when the lookers on their own things become lookers also on the things of others, when the revengeful become returners of good for evil, when walkers in their own evil ways and those of the wicked become walkers in the steps of Him

who went about continually doing good,—then, indeed, instead of the destructive and troublesome thorn, comes up the stately and useful fir tree, and instead of the mean and hurtful thistle comes up the beautiful, sensitive, harmless, and fragrant myrtle. Truly great and marvellous is the contrast between sinners before and after conversion.

The unrighteous are as useless and destructive in the moral world as thorns and briers are in the natural. If it were not for the cultivation of the soil, and the good seeds which are sown, and the good trees which are planted in it, the whole world would soon be overrun with thorns and thistles, and become one vast wilderness. And in like manner, but for God's Word accomplishing what He pleases, and prosperously carrying it into effect (verses 11, 12, with 13), there would be no trees, the planting of the Lord, in the moral world; it would become one vast pandemonium, and, like Sodom and Gomorrah, draw down the wrath of God upon it. It is well for the world that God's Word hath not returned unto Him void, but has so accomplished what pleases Him, that—and in countless multitudes of cases—instead of the thorn has come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier has come up the myrtle tree. It is in consequence of those who have undergone the gracious change indicated by this beautiful and figurative language, that the world is not destroyed. They are the salt of the earth that preserves it from destruction. They are the oases in the wilderness, and are destined to convert it into the garden of the Lord. They are the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord; beautiful, flourishing, fragrant, useful, and fruitful trees. Although

from the context (ver. 7), it is plain that the prediction of the text refers to no particular period of the Church's history, for at any time, before or after Christ's advent, a a sinner, on repenting and returning to the Lord, would assuredly undergo the blessed change it so graphically describes; yet it no doubt more especially refers to times when not few but many would seek and find the Lord. Such as the day of Pentecost, the time when the Gentiles began to embrace the Gospel, the time when nations that were formerly heathen would run to the Messiah, the time when the veil would be removed from the heart of God's ancient people, and when they would receive and acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Saviour; these and other blessed seasons of spiritual revival, when multitudes of sinners would turn to the Lord, were doubtless foreseen by the prophet; and it would be during these seasons that most conspicuously, and on an extensive scale, instead of the thorn would come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier would come up the myrtle tree.

Although sin and wickedness still prevail in the world, yet a larger extent of the moral wilderness at the present time has been transformed into the garden of the Lord, than at any bygone period of the Church's history; and never were the indications greater than now that the Word of God is not returning to Him void, but will go on accomplishing that which pleases Him, until "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Then there shall be no longer anything to hurt or to destroy in all God's holy mountain, for not merely here and there, but everywhere, instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, instead of the brier shall

come up the myrtle tree, and the desert all around shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

There is a great diversity of attainments among those who have been regenerated and have begun to grow in the Divine life. Some, in comparison with others, are but feeble Christians, bear but faintly the likeness of their Divine Master, and bring but little fruit forth to His honour and glory; while others are strong in the Lord, bear His image brightly, and bring forth much fruit. Some are but saplings, while others have attained to the growth of full-grown trees. Some are but babes in Christ, while others are men. Yet in every case, instead of the thorn has come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier has come up the myrtle tree. However much one Christian may differ in strength or in stature or in beauty from another, they will all grow in the Divine life until they have attained the full growth of perfect men in Christ Jesus, and are entirely conformed to the likeness of Him who is altogether lovely.

Absolute perfection is never attained in this world, yet it is ever to be aimed at by all who have put on the Lord Jesus—"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

At death the souls of believers will be made perfect in holiness, for into the blessed realms of glory, into which they shall then be admitted, nothing shall enter that defileth. All who enter therein are without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. There shall be nothing there to hurt or destroy. Thorns and briers will never cumber God's holy mountain.

It is in vain for any one to imagine that he has repented

and been forgiven of God, if he has experienced no change to the better in his heart or life. If he is as worldly, or selfish, or uncharitable, or unkind, or unamiable, or as much under the power of his besetting sins as he was before he professed faith in Christ, his faith is not genuine. In his case there has not come up instead of the thorn the fir tree, nor instead of the brier the myrtle tree.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"IT SHALL BE TO THE LORD FOR A NAME."

"IT"—that is, all that shall be accomplished by the Word of God (ver. 11), or by the glad tidings of salvation which sound throughout this whole chapter—shall be to the Lord for a name; even to Jesus Christ, who is as really the alpha and the omega of the chapter as He is of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

The grand result of these tidings is the conversion and sanctification of all who truly repent and return to the Lord; and it is this which shall be to the Captain of our salvation for a name.

Some years ago a benevolent gentleman undertook a great work—a work which held out no pecuniary advantage to himself, but rather the reverse—solely for the benefit of his poor neighbours, who were in very needy circumstances. This work was no less than to reclaim large tracts of waste lands which had long been deemed beyond cultivation. He would not be dissuaded from his purpose by the wise counsels of friends, who told him his scheme was folly itself, and was sure to result in his ruin. He persevered, and success crowned his labours. By-and-by, fields of golden grain waved where nothing but thorns

and thistles and suchlike ever grew before. Many of the people in the district rose up and called him blessed; and his truly was the happiness of the man who *wisely* considereth the case of the poor. An account of his reclaiming of these waste lands appeared in nearly all the newspapers of the kingdom, so that it was to him for a name.

An infinitely greater work than this is being accomplished by Jesus Christ, even the transforming of the moral world into the garden of the Lord. It is He who, by His Word and Spirit, converts the wicked and the ungodly, and so radically changes their nature that they are said to become new creatures in Him. Sinners become saints. "Instead of the thorn comes up the fir tree, and instead of the brier comes up the myrtle tree." As this gracious work proceeds, it becomes more and more manifest; it cannot be hid: and it is to the Lord for a name. Every new convert is a new herald to spread abroad the Redeemer's praise.

Philanthropy is to Howard for a name. The abolition of slavery is to Wilberforce, and to Lincoln, and to the Beecher family, and "Uncle Tom," and John Brown, of Harper's Ferry, for a name. Patriotism is to Wallace and Bruce for a name. Saving the perishing at the risk of one's own life is to Grace Darling for a name. Ragged schools are to John Pounds and Dr. Guthrie for a name. And the preaching of the Gospel is to Paul and Whitefield and Wesley and Chalmers and Spurgeon for a name.

But high above all these works of mercy and of love, as high above them as the heavens are above the earth,

the salvation of sinners is to Jesus for a name. What are all the noble deeds and self-sacrificing labours of these noble men and women in comparison with the work of Him whose mission was and is to save a lost world? He came to give His life a ransom for sinners. He came to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. He invited, and still invites, all the burdened and the distressed and the miserable to come to Him with all their cares and sorrows —"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And He calls to all perishing sinners to look to Himself for salvation—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." His mission has not been in vain. His invitations have not returned to Him void. A number, which no man can count, has already been saved by Him—saved with an everlasting salvation. The saved are to Him for a name.

The prediction of the text has already in large measure been fulfilled, and will increasingly be fulfilled as time rolls on. Nations that did not even know God when Isaiah prophesied, notably Britain and America, are now called by His name—a name, too, which they esteem above all others. No one, surely, can reflect on the number of Christ's true disciples now on the earth, the many languages into which the Bible has been translated, and its unparalleled circulation, our missionary societies, and the missionaries they have sent forth to proclaim the Gospel in almost every heathen country in the world,

without being assured that if the time has not yet come, it is coming, when, at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is God, to the glory of God the Father. "His name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed." Thus the salvation of sinners shall be to Christ for a name.



CHAPTER XXVII.

"AN EVERLASTING SIGN."

"It shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."—ISAIAH lv. 13.

THAT which shall be to Christ for a name shall also be to Him for a sign or memorial. It has been the custom in all ages to raise pillars, statues, and other structures in honour of illustrious individuals, with the view of perpetuating the memory of their virtues and deeds to future generations. In keeping with this intention, monuments are formed of stone, marble, bronze, or other durable material, and yet, not excepting the pyramids of Egypt themselves, they are, less or more, subject to decay. But Christ's memorial, composed of all those who have been pardoned and sanctified, is indestructible, and will last, unimpaired and with ever-increasing beauty and strength, through all the coming ages, however many these may be. Whatever may perish, it shall remain, for "it is an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Monuments have sometimes the names and a list of a few of the chief virtues and works of their subjects inscribed on them, but the materials of which such monuments are formed—the stone or the marble or the bronze

—have in themselves no affinity whatever to the honoured individuals. It is altogether different with Christ's monument, for it is not only called by His name, but it is composed of the trophies of His grace. As lively stones, they are built up a spiritual house, whose great design and aim is to hold Him in remembrance, and to magnify His great and glorious name. Of these lively stones it is said —"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

How strikingly this memorial—the Church of Christ on earth—is testifying both to the great things which have been predicted concerning Him, and to the great things which He has accomplished as the Saviour of mankind! What a striking fulfilment have we in it of that prophecy—"Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee" (Isa. lv. 5). The Church of Christ at the present time is almost exclusively composed of converted Gentiles. What a striking testimony it bears to His promise of forgiveness to the wicked and ungodly, on their repenting of their sins! All its members are forgiven sinners, and amongst them are many whose sins were not only innumerable, but of the very deepest dye. What a striking testimony it bears also to the transforming power of His grace, to create anew those who, by nature, are dead in trespasses and sins, and to transform them into His own lovely image! In the case of every one of the true members of Christ's Church, instead of the thorn has come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier has come up the myrtle tree. The Church is, further, ever testifying to

His great love for a sinful and perishing world by seeking, and ever more and more, to obey His last command—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

The Church, besides, is ever testifying to the great things which Christ has done for itself—"He loved the church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." The nearer the Church approaches to this perfection on the earth, the more bright and beautiful it becomes as Christ's memorial. Whatever may be its present defects, it is even now a glorious Church, and is fulfilling its great end in glorifying Him. Its spirit, its character, its mission, all proclaim it to be His.

The sanctified individuals of which it is composed are removed like other men from the earth, so that a time comes when the place that once knew them knows them no more for ever; but though they are removed, the Church survives, and will survive, on the earth to the very end of time, for "it is an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Not only the Church itself, but every individual member of it, shall be to Christ for a memorial. Monuments bear the names of their subjects. We say this is Nelson's, or Wellington's, or Scott's, or Prince Albert's monument; and so we may say of every true believer, "He is Christ's memorial. He bears His name." Of Christ's people it is said—"His name shall be in their foreheads." Some monuments not only bear the names, but in whole

or in part resemble the illustrious individuals in whose honour they have been raised. This or that statue is so like the original that it is easily recognisable, independently of any name that may be inscribed on it. So Christ's people are known by their resemblance to Him. But they resemble Him not merely as a statue resembles its subject, but also as children resemble their parents. Whoever may question if this or that one is a child of Christ, if he bears His image, that is enough to silence all gainsayers. Some, no doubt, bear His image more brightly than others, but none of His true disciples bear it so faintly as not to show they are His. They are all legible epistles, known and read of all men, and in greater or less degree are ever showing forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. None of them, it is true, is yet perfect. The image of Christ is sadly marred by sin in even the best of them. But the law of their new life is to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness, and so to grow ever liker and liker to Jesus. "We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Thus believers are ever becoming brighter and brighter memorials of Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. Every one of them is to Christ for a sign or memorial.

As far as this world is concerned, the believer is not to Christ for an *everlasting* sign that shall not be cut off; for, as previously remarked, though the Church survives, he is removed. He dies like other men. But when he dies, he is not lost but gone before. He is removed from

this world at death, but then it is in order to his being translated to heaven, there to become a living and resplendent stone in that great memorial-building that is now being reared to the eternal honour of Jesus. The stones of that great and glorious temple, like those for Solomon's, are all cut and chiselled and polished and beautified, ere they are brought to occupy their respective places in it. It is here on earth that the stones for Christ's everlasting sign are prepared. Christ's temple is receiving additions every day, so that it is ever rising higher and higher, and will continue to rise till the last sinner that shall embrace the Gospel has believed and put on Christ. That ransomed sinner shall be the last living stone of the great monument. He will be the cope-stone, and will be laid with such shouts of, Grace, grace unto it, as shall never before have resounded through the universe.

What a glorious memorial! All others that have ever existed, or do now exist, have inscribed on them, "No abiding." This only is an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Everything that men esteem or prize in this world, that is, or shall remain, dissociated from this sign, shall perish or be cut off. But this shall endure; this will survive the wreck of ages, and the crash of worlds. After the affairs of this world are wound up, those only who form a part of this monument shall shine with the beauty of holiness, enjoy true peace and lasting joy, increase in the knowledge of God and His ways, serve Him day and night in His holy temple, and unite their celestial and unwearied voices in singing His praises. Every living stone of the great spiritual house which is to form Christ's everlasting memorial shall be vocal, and cause

heaven's lofty arches to ring for ever and for ever with His honoured name.

The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah forms one beautiful whole. Its words and clauses and verses and parts are most intimately connected, as we have endeavoured to show. It has a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end. "Ho" forms a very striking introduction to the rich and invaluable blessings that lie between it and the close of this portion of God's Word; while the last sentence, "It shall not be cut off," is the most glorious ending possible, referring as it does to that ever-enduring spiritual temple, composed of all Christ's ransomed people, which is the grand outcome of the "Joyful Sound." After God Himself, there is nothing so glorious in the whole universe as the family of Christ's redeemed people. "It shall be to him for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." May it be our blessedness to be numbered among the lively stones of this great and glorious temple! If we are not, Where —oh! where shall we appear?

LORIMER AND GILLIES, PRINTERS, 31 ST. ANDREW SQUARE, EDINBURGH.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED.

Fourth Edition, Cloth Limp, 1s. 6d., Boards, 2s. 6d.,

THE TABERNACLE OF ISRAEL,

AND

ITS PRIESTS AND SERVICES.

BY WILLIAM BROWN.

With Forty Illustrations.

EDINBURGH: WILLIAM OLIPHANT & CO.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"An instructive interpretation of the types of the Tabernacle."—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

"It is the completest and wisest handbook to the Tabernacle and its Leviticus that we know."—*The British Quarterly Review.*

"The author, at cost of much time, trouble, and research, has, as it were, pulled to pieces and reconstructed upon paper, and with the aid of illustrative diagrams, the famous prototype of the true God's house."—*Illustrated London News.*

"Will be valuable to Sunday-school teachers and also to ministers. It contains carefully-prepared plans, measurements, diagrams, and other helps to the mechanical understanding of the ancient place of God's true worship. In the spiritual exposition, Mr. Brown shows

what may be soberly regarded as the true import of the typical construction and services. Here the author avoids the fanciful or even whimsical notions of some writers, and gives his readers what will edify and delight them. The difficulty about the 'scape-goat,' or Azazel, is well dealt with, neither controversy nor avoidance of the real doctrine being allowed to mar the pages of a work intended for general readers."—*The Record.*

"The minute descriptions, accompanied with diagrams, views, and woodcuts, give an idea of the magnificence of this sacred tent, such as few will have realised. Any Biblical student would find it of service."—*Literary World.*

"Every part of the Tabernacle is described with a minuteness that might enable the reader to make a model of the building."—*Theological Review.*

"A well-considered and well-illustrated account of the Jewish Tabernacle."—*School Board Chronicle.*

"Mr. Brown's able work is really exhaustive of the subject. It is adorned by beautiful engravings of the High Priest, the Court of the Tabernacle, the Lavers, and other persons and things; and also by very many diagrams and wood engravings."—*The Illustrated Review.*

"It is worthy of careful perusal, and contains much which will be found interesting, even by those to whom its subject is already familiar."—*Edinburgh Courant.*

"An elaborate and ingenious treatise."—*Dundee Advertiser.*

"It meets a want long felt."—*United Presbyterian Magazine.*

"Mr. Brown deserves the thanks of ministers, Sabbath-school teachers, and all expositors and students of the Bible, for the clear light he has thrown upon a subject requiring close and patient study in order to arrive at a satisfactory acquaintance with its scope and details."—*Daily Review.*

"Interesting and useful."—*Congregationalist.*

"The author is quite up to the literature of his subject, to which he does justice."—*Glasgow Herald.*

"Mr. Brown has manifestly studied the subject thoroughly, and in some particulars corrects the views and statements of different able writers."—*N. B. Daily Mail.*

"A very interesting volume."—*Scotsman.*

"A good idea wrought out carefully and well. As a handbook to the study of the symbolism of the Tabernacle, should be in the hands of every student of the Bible."—*Scottish Congregationalist.*

"We can recommend his book to those who wish an exhaustive account."—*Nonconformist.*

"A copiously illustrated volume; contains a minute discussion of the difficulties connected with the wilderness tent, in which the texts describing its construction are carefully examined, and the views of Mr. Fergusson, Dr. Kalisch, and others criticised."—*British and Foreign Evangelical Review.*

"A well-illustrated description of the Jewish Tabernacle. Carefully detailed helps to the clear conception of the appearance of the sacred tent."—*Sunday-School Teacher* (London Sunday-School Union).

"A remarkably clear and satisfactory description."—*The Presbyterian.*

"The subject is treated in the most thorough and exhaustive manner."—*The Preacher's Lantern.*

"We have not seen any book that, in an equal compass, sets forth so fully and clearly all that may be known of the place where God was worshipped while Israel sojourned in the wilderness."—*The Presbyterian* (Philadelphia).

"The author has entered, in the minutest detail and with exceeding pains, into the whole subject of the Jewish Tabernacle, in a volume which is as elaborate and full as a set treatise could be, and abounds with illustrations."—*Guardian.*

"It will take its rightful place as a standard book of reference, and deserves a wide circulation."—*The Christian World.*

"As a book of reference on the subject it will be invaluable, while it will also afford interesting matter for general reading."—*English Independent.*

"We cannot speak too highly of this interesting and beautifully got up volume."—*Christian News.*

"Mr. Brown, though often in contact with such authorities as Kalisch, Fergusson, &c., seems, on the whole, to hold his ground with much success."—*The Graphic.*

"It is *the* book of reference on the Tabernacle and its Leviticus."—*The Sunday Teachers' Treasury.*

"Full of sound information, abounds with suggestive lessons, and is enriched with many admirable engravings. Without indulging in any wild fancies, Mr. Brown has found a real Gospel in the Old Testament."—*Watchman.*

"The work is evidently the result of much thoughtful investigation, and of earnest, loving interest in the theme; and Mr. Brown has been eminently successful in it."—*Evangelical Magazine.*

"The various details are very carefully described and commented upon with great clearness."—*The Rock.*

"Mr. Brown has concentrated on the Temple of the Wilderness all the light that is ever likely to be available on the subject."—*Free Church Record.*

"Revised and enlarged. Mr. Brown has done well in re-issuing this book."—*The Literary World.*

"Anything more complete or more satisfactory, in all respects, we do not know."—*The General Baptist Magazine.*

"As a guide to the Tabernacle and its services this book is unsurpassed."—*Scottish Baptist Magazine.*

EDINBURGH: WILLIAM OLIPHANT & CO.